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THE PRACTICAL PAGAN

Dana D. Eilers

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PRACTICAL
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PRACTICAL
PAGAN

BY
DANA D. EILERS



NEW PAGE BOOKS
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Franklin Lakes, NJ

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∞ Dedication ∞

This book is dedicated to my Mother—
Goddess, healer, and Witch—who taught me
most of what I know long before it was
fashionable. Back in those days, we just called
it discipline and the right kind of upbringing.
Thank you, Mother.

≈ Acknowledgments ≈

This is my first book and so, there are going to be a few acknowledgments. First, I would like to thank my mother and my father, without whose generosity, love, and support, this would never have happened. My heartfelt thanks go out to Chere Belknap for her assistance and recommendations. I am a techno-nincompoop, and without Ray White, I would still be struggling with my errant computer.

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I would like to thank my friends at Orleans Camera and Video in East Harwich for steering me through the photography process. I never knew what a TIFF file was, but they sure did.

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Introduction

One of the most commonly asked questions from people who believe that they may be Pagan and from people who have decided that they are Pagan is this: *Now what do I do?* This question has generated some significant distress among people. Somehow, somewhere, folks get the idea that there is a certain course of action that they must take or certain things that they must do in order to be Pagan. Hopefully, this book will help you realize that Paganism is not about what you must do. Instead, you will realize, Paganism is about your freedom to explore and to experience.

First and foremost, Paganism is a form of spirituality, and, as such, it is a deeply personal thing. It means many things to many people. For this reason, I wish to stress at the outset that when it comes to the exploration and fulfillment of anyone's spirituality, the ultimate decisions of what to do and what not to do are for the individual to make.

For example, look at books. Books are nice. In fact, I love books, and I cannot stress highly enough the value of reading, of learning, and of educating one's self. However,

no one book contains all the answers (not even this one) and all the right directions. Just because author so-and-so fulfills his or her Pagan spirituality in one manner does not mean that you must fulfill yours in the same manner.

Web sites and computer-based information are terrific, but just because someone posted it on a Web site or put it on an e-mail list does not make it academically true or intrinsically true for you.

Gurus, teachers, and mentors are terrific. I have taught many a class and have done quite a few lectures, but, again, the path chosen by a specific teacher, Priestess, Druid Par Excellence, or Supreme Ceremonial Magician is just that: their path, and it may or may not be applicable to you.

One of the great joys in Paganism, as compared to other more structured or more mainstream forms of spirituality, is this: the freedom afforded to the individual to make up his or her own mind about what to do or what not to do. In this realm of spiritual exploration and fulfillment, many of the fundamental and underlying decisions will be up to you, the individual. As you will soon recognize, there are no books of holy scripture here, such as a Bible or a Torah or a Koran. Pagans and non-Pagans alike constantly ask if there is one, singular, perfectly scripted manuscript or holy tome on “how to be a Pagan.” The answer is that no such volume exists. There are some very good books and some very fine traditions out there, but all spiffy, eye-catching titles aside, no one book purports to be the road map of *How to be a Pagan*.

For some people, who are used to being told what to do, what to think, and what to believe by their religious leaders, this can be most perplexing. Yet, it is exactly this freedom that so endears Paganism to the hearts of many of its proponents.

Keeping this in mind, you should not read this book and believe that I am telling you that “this is how it must be done” or that “this is what you must do” in order to be Pagan. This book offers suggestions, hints, and help for those who might be feeling a little lost out there in this world of personal spiritual freedom. I have met many a wide-eyed, somewhat desperate, somewhat exasperated Seeker in a bookstore, shop, or seminar who wanted to know: “*What do I do now?*” Hopefully, this book will assist you in answering that question.

I am sure that you will have many more questions as you pursue your quest. This is only the beginning. What I am going to tell you, however, is that you should not lose or abandon the common sense that you were hopefully born with. People enter Paganism from their other lives and, most of the time, they come with a wealth of common sense gained from their years of living and experience. Yet, for some odd reason, there are folks who have a tendency to abandon their common sense once they get here. I have yet to figure out why that is.

Some people come to Paganism without ever having developed much common sense at all. I don’t know why this is, either! Maybe people think that Paganism is a place where having no common sense is just fine. From experience, let me tell you: You need your common sense, some good manners, and a healthy dollop of courtesy in the Pagan realm. This book is about developing these things so that you can successfully navigate through the Pagan world with as little difficulty as possible.

Although I have believed what I believe about the Universe for a very long time, I came to the realization that I was a modern Pagan woman in the very early 1980s during law school. However, I held this epiphany close to my heart until graduating from law school and meeting my first teacher in St. Louis in the late 1980s. By the early

1990s, I had become involved with a group of active Pagans in the St. Louis area, which was where I began my legal career and established a life for myself once I got out of school. I found that I was fascinated by all aspects of Paganism, particularly, with the life experiences of Pagans. I was especially interested in how Pagans integrated their “before I was Pagan” life with their “now I am Pagan” life.

In 1993, I created a forum where Pagans could openly and candidly interact with one another. I called this ongoing series of talks *Conversations With Pagans*. As a regular event, *Conversations With Pagans* ran once a month for five years in St. Louis, and it attracted the Pagan folk, the Pagan-friendly folk, the Pagan-curious folk, and non-Pagan folk. Among my intentions in offering this forum for communication and interaction was the exploration of how Pagans were dealing with their newfound spirituality or, depending on the individual, with their long-established spirituality. I have also presented *Conversations With Pagans* at various Pagan events, Pagan gatherings, and science-fiction and fantasy conventions in other cities and states. Additionally, I have made *Conversations With Pagans* available as a forum in the Cape Cod, Massachusetts, area on a fairly regular basis. During these sessions of *Conversations With Pagans*, a wide variety of topics that were interesting to Pagans have been addressed and discussed. I have tried not to censor these discussions. While facilitating this forum, I have found that several topics kept reappearing. Both newbie Pagans and old-time Pagans have enjoyed discussing these issues no matter how many times they keep showing up.

This book arises out of those conversations. It addresses those reoccurring questions that Pagans ponder as they undergo their journey into this realm of experiential spirituality.

Introduction

These are not issues that require wisdom gained from years of studying arcane lore, but they do require the application of a little common sense, which is a very powerful magick potion all its own. Thus, my approach here is not to teach hidden and mysterious magickal secrets; rather, it is to assert a common-sense approach to Paganism.



CHAPTER 1

What the Heck Is a Pagan?

Perhaps one of the most difficult things that modern Pagans struggle with is definitions. How do we define ourselves? What are we? *How do I know that I am a Pagan?* is a question that I have heard over and over again. Another plaintive cry I have heard goes like this: *I know what I am not, but defining myself by what I am not might not be the greatest thing in the world. Shouldn't I be more positive about this?*

Perhaps my favorite plea for help with a definition sounds something like this: *I know what I believe (I think), and it is not alternative! It is just as valid as what anybody else believes.* Well, of course it is. However, the practical Pagan understands that there does come a time when we must describe and define ourselves to someone, whether to our friends, our families, our lawyers, other Pagans, or just ourselves with courage, conviction, and some kind of coherence.

Trying to adequately define the term *Pagan* is one of the most controversial and hotly debated issues in the modern

Pagan community, whether it be on-line, at a seminar, or in a book such as this one. If you put 10 self-professed Pagans in a room, you will probably wind up with more than 15 definitions of Paganism. So, how do we do commit this act of self definition and achieve something that is understandable to ourselves and to the other people who look to us to be clear about this? The practical Pagan starts at the beginning, with the word itself, and then slowly adapts the word to his or her own needs.

DEFINITIONS? WHO NEEDS DEFINITIONS?

The modern word *pagan* is derived from the Latin word *paganus*, meaning country dweller or peasant. That is about the most definite thing we can say about the word itself. It does not sound particularly positive, either. From here on out, it becomes rather convoluted, but don't despair. The practical Pagan is part scholar and enjoys a little intellectual challenge. It is something we must all get used to because we are going to be challenged as Pagans: by ourselves, by non-Pagans, and, most emphatically of all, by other Pagans.

If you look up the word *pagan* in a dictionary, some of the definitions may not be particularly applicable or attractive. For example, *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* (1977) defines a Pagan first as a follower of a polytheistic religion, with citations to ancient Rome, and second as a person who has little or no religion and one who delights in sensual pleasures and goods. Regarding the first definition, there are many modern Pagans who worship and/or believe in multiple deities (that is, gods and goddesses). Some of today's Pagans are attempting to reconstruct and/or modify ancient religions to suit their modern needs.

Regarding the second definition, I personally find that it is phrased in an unattractive manner. Nonetheless, portions of it are applicable. I do know modern Pagans who are unabashed in their enjoyment of sensual pleasures and goods. This does not necessarily mean that they have no religion!

In her book, *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*, Barbara G. Walker further expounds on the Latin term *paganii* (plural for *paganus*) and states that these were the “rural people whose religious conservatism caused them to cling to old gods and goddesses even when Christianity was well established in cities and among the aristocracy.”¹ This may have been true in the pre-industrial age, but certainly a vast number of today's Pagans live in urban areas, such as sprawling metropolitan complexes, cities, and the suburbs. The modern Pagan is no longer hiding out in a thatched dirt hovel at the edge of town or deep in the forest, as many Witches in the Fairy tales used to do. Additionally, many Pagans nowadays do profess a belief in ancient gods and goddesses. There are modern Pagans everywhere who believe in and pray to such ancient deities as Isis, Odin, Lugh, or Kali, to name just a few. These Pagans structure their prayers, worship, and rituals accordingly.

Writer Prudence Jones defined a Pagan religion as having three characteristics in *Paganism Today*. “It is polytheistic, recognizing a plurality of divine beings which may or may not be reducible to an underlying One—or Two, or Three, etc. It sees the material world and its laws. . . as a theophany, a manifestation of divinity. . . Finally, Pagan religions recognize the female face of divinity, called by modern Pagans the Goddess; taken for granted in Her many manifestations by the Pagans of the ancient world.

A religion that does not accept that divinity may manifest in female form is not, on this definition, Pagan.”²

You know, I have to tell you, there are many Pagans who believe exactly this. However, there are also many Pagans who believe exactly not this; that is, they do not anthropomorphize Deity at all. These Pagans do not attribute Deity with human form or characteristics. To them, Deity may be a form of transcendent consciousness or the supreme pattern of energy in the Universe.

Some modern Pagans define their spiritual beliefs and practices as being “Earth-based.” You will often hear the term *Earth religion* used in conjunction with definitions of modern Paganism. An Earth-based spirituality or an Earth religion has Mother Earth—terra firma—at its center. Such Pagans view the Earth as a divine creative force. These Pagan folk structure their rituals, practices, and calendar upon the cycles of the Earth. They often refer to their calendar year as the Wheel of the Year. Their yearly celebrations within the Wheel are tied to the ebb and flow of the Earth’s cycles and patterns. Some of the significant signposts are the Fall Equinox; the preparation for Winter and the last of the harvests; the Winter Solstice; the first thaw of Winter; the Spring Equinox; the rites of Spring; the Summer Solstice; the harvest of the grain, and so forth. Earth-based Pagan folk also often incorporate the cycles of the moon (the full moon, the waning moon, the dark of the moon, the waxing moon, blue moons, and eclipses) into their beliefs, rituals, and practices.

Not surprisingly, these Pagans also pay homage to and/or revere the sun; thus, it is that the yearly solstices and equinoxes are recognized within the calendar and are celebrated according to the views and beliefs of the various Earth-based traditions. Among the Earth-based traditions

celebrating the signposts within the Wheel of the Year are Wicca, whose practitioners are known as Wiccans, and Witchcraft, whose practitioners are known as Witches. (Trying to define and distinguish Wiccans and Witches from one another is a particularly sticky wicket, so to speak. Some scholars, practitioners, and even courts use the terms interchangeably. For the purposes of this



book, I made no distinction between the two definitions and refer to Wiccans and Witches as spiritual men and women who worship some form of deity (most notably, a goddess), who work magick, and who follow some sort of moral code, such as the Rede.) These folks incorporate the cycles of the sun, the moon phases, and the earth's fertility into their calendar.

DO PAGANS KEEP ANY HOLY DAYS?

A brief glance at the Wiccan Wheel of the Year provides a full view of a year's holy days, often described as Sabbats: (Please take note that all the dates mentioned here should be confirmed on a yearly basis with the assistance of a good almanac.)

The Fall Equinox is the last of the harvests and is generally known as the harvest of the vine, in honor of the grape harvest. This equinox is one of two days of the year when the hours of daylight equal the hours of night. It generally occurs on September 21st.

Samhain, sometimes referred to as The Feast or The Festival of the Dead, is a time to remember one's ancestors and the other honored dead. It is also a preparation for Winter. Agriculturally, it is linked to the annual slaughtering of the livestock and salting of the meat. Wiccans regard this as the highest of the holy days, and it is also known as the Witches' New Year. There are many traditions and notions associated with this Sabbat. Among them is the idea that at Samhain, the veil that separates the land of the living from the land of the dead is at its thinnest point. Therefore, it is an ideal time to perform divination, as the view into other realms of existence is at its clearest. This is the best time to interact with the Spirit World. Samhain occurs on October 31st.

The Winter Solstice, also known as Yule, celebrates the longest night of the year and the return of the sun once the night is over. In many Wiccan traditions, the Goddess gives birth to the God at Yule. The date for Yule is December 22nd.

Imbolg celebrates winter's first thaw and recognizes the first signs of the Earth's annual renewal. It is usually celebrated on February 2nd.

The Vernal Equinox or Spring Equinox, also known as Eostre or Ostara, is the other day of the year when the hours of daylight equal the hours of night. This Sabbat honors the balance between the light and the dark and the greening of the Earth after the winter. It is usually celebrated on March 21st.

May Eve, also known as Beltane, celebrates the rites of Spring, the coming of warmer seasons, and the rampant fertility and fecundity of the Earth, together with all Her creatures. This Sabbat occurs on April 30th.

The Summer Solstice, honoring the high noon of the year and the longest day of the year, is a time to revel in the magnificent fruitfulness of the earth. It usually occurs on June 22nd.

The first of the Fall harvests, or the harvest of the grain, is also known as Lughnassadh. This refers to Lugh, an ancient Celtic God, and it usually occurs on July 31st.

Thus, the Wheel is once again positioned at the Fall Equinox.

Now then, entire volumes have been written regarding the yearly celebrations of Pagans. This book is not a treatise on these Pagan celebrations. They are merely offered here as a quick look at the sorts of festivals celebrated by Pagans and a brief glimpse into what these celebrations are about. The practical Pagan will do the research necessary to become familiar with each Sabbat and personalize it so that it has meaning and value, if such celebrations and calendar keeping are applicable to you, of course.

Wiccans and Witches also celebrate the monthly lunar changes in rituals known as esbats.

These are times of reverence for the full moon, the waxing moon, the waning moon, and the dark of the moon. Specific forms of magick are practiced according to the lunar cycle and according to the various Wiccan traditions.

I THINK MY KIND OF PAGANISM CAME FROM A MOVIE

On a much simpler note, there are Pagans who celebrate the cycles of the Universe without any reference to Deity, gods, goddesses, or a divine consciousness at all. To them, spirituality is based on a connection with the massive energy ebbs and flows in the cosmos. Put this way, Paganism starts to sound a lot like being a Jedi Knight. This is not as far fetched or goofy as it sounds. There are modern Pagan religions that originated in modern works of fiction; for example, the Church of All Worlds had its origins in a fictional novel: *Stranger in a Strange Land* by Robert Heinlein. There are Pagans who practice a belief system similar to that created by Marion Zimmer Bradley in *The Mists of Avalon*. The practical Pagan recognizes what rings “true” and what does not. The practical Pagan will take what strikes the deep chord within and will adapt it to his/her use.

Then, there are the eclectic Pagans. These folk incorporate beliefs, magic, ritual, prayers, and practices from varied and diverse sources. Such a Pagan may believe in the Celtic goddess Cerridwen and also in the Egyptian god Anubis, without any reference to the other deities in either pantheon. Traditional Celts and strict Egyptian reconstructionists may take issue with this sort of thing, but the more eclectic Pagans find their own form of spiritual nourishment in their beliefs, and, after all, this is what should be the most important thing. Most eclectic Pagans are very sincere in their beliefs, even if those beliefs appear to be a somewhat crazy quilt or mishmash amalgam of unrelated traditions. I speak from experience here, as I am a very eclectic kind of Witch.

Please remember that one's spirituality is a deeply personal thing. Despite admonitions and chastisements from other sources, practical Pagans are strongly encouraged to explore experientially and to study in a scholarly fashion the aspects and facets of the spiritual traditions that interest them. The practical Pagan understands the need for practice, for experience, and for study, noting that personal spiritual freedom is precious to modern Pagan practice.

In her book, *Drawing Down the Moon*, Margot Adler identifies some threads that seem to be woven into the theosophies and philosophies of many modern Pagans: animism, pantheism, and polytheism. In defining animism, Adler notes that "all things are imbued with vitality" and that, to the Ancients, there was no separation between the animate and the inanimate; thus everything partakes of the life force. In defining pantheism, Adler states that "divinity is inseparable from nature and that deity is immanent in nature." She notes that Pagans perform rituals wherein mortals can become the gods. Finally, she discusses the concept of polytheism, the notion that "reality (divine or otherwise) is multiple and diverse."³

It seems fair to say that, according to Adler, Pagans view nature and everything in it, from rocks to humans, as possessing a divine spark within. Divinity is not only imminent (within us), but it is also transcendent (outside us). However, the practical Pagan understands that Divinity is never so far outside us or beyond us that we cannot connect with it in some form or another.

For example, it has been said (and seems to be a common notion in popular culture) that Pagans worship Nature. It might be more fair to say that Pagans worship the Divine, which exists within Nature. Thus, Nature is a

symbol of that which is Divine. Pagans connect with the Divine through Nature. Not all Pagans necessarily view Nature itself as the “be all and end all.”

Books are not the only places where all these pesky definitions of Paganism are discussed. The computer age has brought with it an opportunity for education, networking, and exploration hitherto unknown to the masses seeking spiritual enlightenment. For example, the Web site of the Pagan Educational Network (www.PaganEdNet.org) describes modern Paganism as “a collection of diverse contemporary religions rooted in or inspired by indigenous traditions worldwide. Pagan religions are characterized by Earth-centered spirituality, belief in the interconnection of all life, personal autonomy, polytheism, and immanent divinity. Pagans value diversity, good works, living lightly on the Earth, individual freedom, personal responsibility, community service, gender equity, and spiritual development.” It’s quite a mouthful, but it is also indicative of the attempts being made by modern Pagans to adequately define themselves. It is one of the better attempts, by the way. The sacred cow dictionaries would do well to look at modern definitions of Paganism, crafted by modern Pagans, when rolling out their definitions.

I’M A PAGAN, BUT I CAN’T EVEN GET PAST THE DEFINITION!

Does this all sound terribly complicated? It probably does. As you can see, there are varying definitions of Paganism, and scholars debate the broad range of ideas to be found within Paganism. Being a practical Pagan myself, I have gone looking for simpler and more concise definitions of what a Pagan is. That quest eventually took me to

the “Not Perspective.” The Not Perspective definition of Paganism might not be politically correct, but for a lot of people, it rings true. Why would this perspective not be a particularly keen idea? Some of my peers argue strongly that it is never a good idea to define one’s self from the perspective of what one is “not.” These folks don’t find this definition bold or positive. It is not assertive enough. One gentleman who regularly attended Conversations With Pagans in St. Louis, and who adamantly described himself as a Pagan, defined it this way, “*Well, I know what I am not.*” Everyone in the room laughed as though they understood and connected with this intuitive definition and all its unspoken subtleties. As I mentioned previously, some people really do identify with this description. Throughout the years, I have found that a number of Pagan folk have strongly identified with this “whom we are not” description.

So, for those who might find themselves within such a viewpoint, here is the “Not Perspective” of Paganism: Paganism is not Judaism; it is not Christian; it is not Buddhist; it is not Hindu; and it is not Islamic. If you are looking for mainstream ideas within Paganism, you are looking in the wrong place. Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam are the five primary, mainstream religions extant on the planet today. I often refer to them as “The Big Five.”

Paganism is not a member of The Big Five. Why is this? Most Pagan spiritual traditions fall between the cracks of The Big Five—that is, they do not fit within the frameworks and rules established by these religions. However, many Christians have, over time, referred to anyone not Christian as Pagan. Thus, according to some Christian definitions, everyone else other than a Christian would

be defined as Pagan, whether they were a member of The Big Five or not! Certainly, some Christians have (and still do) viewed native, aboriginal spiritual belief systems as heathen and Pagan, with all the bad connotations thereto. This is usually the justification for the Christian “mission” to go out among native, aboriginal peoples and bring them the Christian version of God and of salvation.

Such proselytizing and evangelizing is usually considered antithetical to Pagans and is usually not practiced as such among Pagans. Still, exceptions to the rule do exist. There are some Pagans who, in their fervor and passion, would convert the world if they could. They are trying to convert the world even though they can’t. Well, okay, this is their thing. I think that I was one of these people once. However, practicality prevailed. The practical Pagan realizes that in a lot of cases, the best you can hope for is a rational conversation. World conversion on a massive scale simply is not going to happen.

Yes, I admit it, the “Not Perspective” is still flawed as a description. Even members of The Big Five have Pagan attributes. For example, Hinduism closely resembles some forms of modern Paganism: It is polytheistic with major feminine deities. There are modern Pagans who incorporate certain Hindu gods and goddesses into their pantheons. The goddess Kali is a particular favorite of many modern Pagans, as are some of the Hindu gods, such as Ganesha. The notion of a divine sexual union is often symbolized by the erotic embrace of Shiva and Shakti.

Some folks also maintain that certain Pagan traditions incorporate Christian beliefs and deity forms. For example, Santeria is generally considered to be a Pagan tradition; however, it melds together the Yoruban orishas and the Catholic saints. Magickal practitioners also point to the

praying of the Rosary and the practice of the Novena as a form of magick. Some Pagans argue that Catholics actually worship multiple deities. In support of this argument, these persons point to the holy trinity of the Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost; the cult of Mary; and the cults of the saints. It is asserted that this highly structured view of the cosmos is somewhat akin to the Wiccan view of the Universe.

It would appear that if one is looking for a definition, the “Not Perspective” still presents a quagmire of problems. Furthermore, if you were to define Pagan as all religions not of The Big Five, then such a definition would include the Native American spiritual traditions and the Japanese national spiritual tradition of Shintoism. However, many Native Americans refuse to be categorized or described as Pagan, and, as members of the major religion in Japan, some Shinto practitioners may also refuse to be described as Pagan.

YOU MIGHT BE A PAGAN IF...

Still confused? I bet. In conducting Conversations With Pagans, one of the favorite topics was “What is a Pagan?” Usually, after we got done with all the various definitions, it came down to how one “felt” about the Universe and one’s own place in it. For those of you who may still be scratching your heads, think about the following things. Are you currently part of an organized, mainstream religion with which you are unhappy and from which you feel distanced or isolated? Do you find divine inspiration in a forest, at the beach, in a thunderstorm, under the light of the moon, in the blazing heat of the desert, on a winter’s night when the snow is falling, or in the heart of a campfire? Have ancient religions, ancient history, and

ancient mythology always fascinated you? Do you feel a connection to the gods of the ancients? Have certain periods in history always attracted you for reasons you cannot (or can) articulate? Do you have questions that mainstream religious teaching has been unsuccessful in answering for you? Do you fail to understand why you are always praying to a male deity and why you can't pray to a female deity? Do you think that "God" may have a feminine as well as a masculine face? Do you believe in magick and the power of the spirit to heal? Can you visualize what you want and get it? Have you ever looked at pictures or movies of ancient temples and felt a strange sense of familiarity? Do you believe that even animals have spirits or souls? Does a forest seem to be a living entity to you? Does a lake, an ocean, a river, or a stream seem to be a living entity to you? Do you believe in or feel the presence of Guardian Spirits? Do your potential answers to these questions empower you, excite you, or enthrall you?



Although it would be up to each of you reading this to decide, I have listened to hundreds of people answer questions such as these affirmatively. As they did so, a sparkle entered their eyes as recognition dawned. Whether all at once or slowly, most people who answered one, some, or all of these questions with a “yes” eventually came to the realization that they were Pagan.

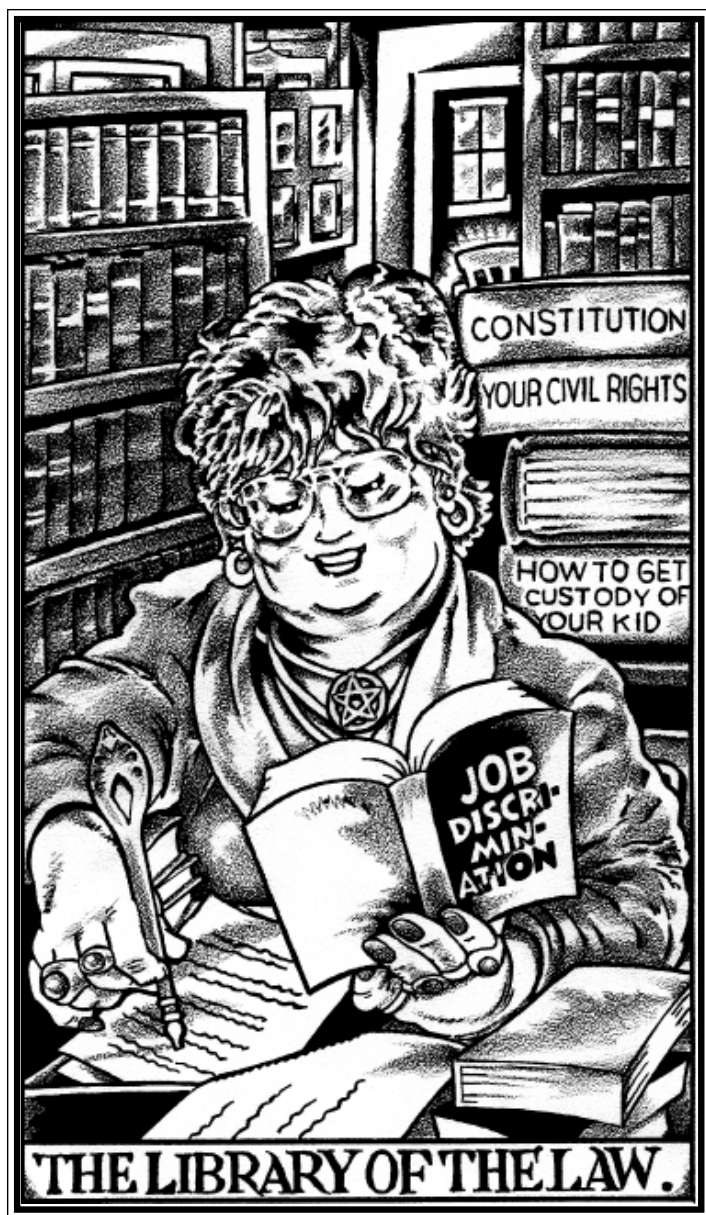
As I noted before, Paganism is not about proselytizing. Pagans do not stand on street corners, monopolize late-night, public access television, or take up residence in airports all in an effort to make converts to the Pagan movement. Practical Pagans generally consider such behavior to be the height of bad manners and, at a minimum, to be intrusive on another’s privacy.

Because most Pagans value their privacy most highly, they do not like to interfere with someone else’s privacy. Most Pagans genuinely feel that if you are drawn to Pagan spirituality in this life, that you are returning to it after having been away from it from a while. Thus, many people who come to Paganism describe a sense of coming home. This is why Paganism, comparatively speaking, is a quiet form of spiritual awakening. We are not out on sidewalks seeking converts; the discovery that one is a Pagan seems to be something that just “happens.”

All scholarly definitions aside, the primary focus of Paganism is spirituality. It has been my experience that, eventually, Paganism makes its way into other aspects of one’s life: diet, values, home decorating, romantic and partnering choices, and so on. However, at its core, Paganism is about spirituality. In a world that seems to have gone mad and seems to have lost its soul, spirituality has become, to many people, quite important. Paganism and the spiritual traditions which fall within its umbrella are

methods for helping the individual connect with “The Great What Is.” This form of spiritual expression is about our interaction with the Divine, the Universe, the Gods and Goddesses, or however you wish to express it: The Great What Is. This connection helps to complete us, gives us peace, nurtures us, offers us comfort and solace, helps us to cope, and provides us with joy, laughter, and beauty. For many modern Pagans, the mainstream religions can no longer perform these functions, nor do they provide food for the soul. Paganism strikes a deep, resonant chord somewhere inside. It is the place where the Seeker’s heart, spirit, mind, and soul has found “home.”

If any of this has not sounded like gibberish or heresy to you, if you have tears in your eyes or have goose bumps, if the hair on your neck and head is standing up, or if you just feel like saying, “Yes! Thank goodness! At last! This sounds familiar,” then perhaps you are Pagan. Welcome home!



THE LIBRARY OF THE LAW.

CHAPTER 2

Should I Panic?

Unfortunately, certain religious/spiritual choices still carry a certain amount of stigma, even in this enlightened age of the First Amendment. People are afraid that if they are Pagan, they will be considered godless cretins with no morals or ethics. They are afraid that they are alone out there and that no one thinks or feels as they do. As most practical Pagans will soon come to know, nothing could be further from the truth.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

Many people who believed that they were Pagan, who had just come to the realization that they were Pagan, or who had been Pagan for a long time but had not told anyone else, have come to me with panic in their eyes and desperation in their voices. They felt alone. So, are you alone? Answer: You are reading this book. Absolutely not! Paganism has been described as one of the most rapidly growing religious movements in the world today.

One estimate, from Aidan Kelly's "An Update on Neopagan Witchcraft in America" (published in *Perspectives on the New Age* in 1992), places the number of Pagans in America at 300,000. Margot Adler discusses the problems of a Pagan census at some length in *Drawing Down the Moon*. It is difficult to tell with any amount of assuredness, because for every publicly declared Pagan, there could be anywhere from three to 10 Pagans who are not publicly declared. By extrapolating in this fashion, the 300,000 figure goes up to three million! However, the simple truth is that there is no reliable Pagan census that tells us just how many modern Pagans are out there. I believe that there are more of us than we suspect. However, there simply is no statistically firm and credible national Pagan census upon which we can base any hard and fast numbers.

Based on the number of book sales, some larger book merchants place the number of Pagans in America in the millions. If you go to such established book merchants as Borders or Barnes and Noble, you can find books about modern Paganism, Goddess worship, the Celtic Revival, and so forth. The Web is bursting with Pagan Web sites, personal Pagan pages, and Pagan services. Rest assured, you are not alone. There are probably people out there with beliefs similar to yours.

THERE IS NO "TYPICAL" PAGAN

Who are these people? There are all sorts of people out there who are Pagan.

Paganism cuts across gender lines, meaning that both men and women are drawn to it. Paganism incorporates into its fold both very young people who are being raised Pagan by their families and mature adults who have been

Pagan for as long as some of us have been alive. Paganism cuts a wide swath across lines of sexual orientation and preference—that is, heterosexuals, homosexuals, lesbians, celibates, transvestites, drag queens, and transsexuals are all drawn to this form of spirituality. Paganism boasts adherents from all different walks of life: doctors, lawyers, engineers, students, artists, construction workers, teachers, bankers, authors, computer technicians, waitresses, farmers, and so on. A Pagan's income can be as widely diverse as the person earning (or not earning) it. Sadly, Paganism also cuts across lines of etiquette. Some Pagans are very polite and understand the value of rational, respectful communication, whereas others do not understand this and can be very rude. The practical Pagan understands the value of manners and uses them.

My favorite example of the broad diversity found within Paganism is the variation in Pagan fashion. There are Pagans in three-piece suits and Pagans with black hair, black lipstick, and black fingernail polish. There are Pagans who affect every form of fashion or lack thereof. Diversity is an amazing thing!

One of the most remarkable cross-sections found within the Pagan community is the cross-section of spiritual history; in other words, where did everyone come from before they got here? From what other religious traditions did the Pagan folk emerge? Many Pagans claim to be recovering Catholics. Some come from very stringent, highly structured religious backgrounds; others have been atheists or agnostics most of their lives. Some Pagans claim to come from families who have been Pagan for centuries. Somewhere in today's Pagan community, there is somebody who comes from a background very similar to yours. You are not the first one to make this leap.

UM, IS THERE SOMETHING THAT I HAVE TO DO NOW?

Now that you are breathing (hopefully) a large sigh of relief, you are probably wondering: *Is there anything I have to do now?* Nope. Absolutely not. There is nothing that you have to do. There are many things that you can do (the subject of later chapters), and many things you will, no doubt, want to do. However, there is nothing that you have to do.

Unlike the mainstream religions, there are no books or manuscripts out there purporting to be the book of holy scripture containing all the dos and don'ts of Paganism. There are books that offer guidelines, suggestions, and advice, such as this one. There are books that contain history, that describe various traditions and how the followers of those traditions do things, and that contain the personal experiences of various Pagans. However, there is no Torah, Koran, or Bible for Pagans.

IS MY BEHAVIOR SUPPOSED TO ALTER NOW?

For the practical Pagan, most of the things that a person does to be a decent and credible human being are the sorts of things that any Pagan should be doing. Be honest, be kind, be polite, respect yourself and others, be responsible, do your homework, pay your taxes, take a bath every day, be neatly groomed, be a responsible pet owner, try to maintain a positive outlook, don't take things that do not belong to you, and, if you are sexually active, practice safe sex. This is not rocket science. This is basic stuff that really does not change despite great spiritual revelations.

A word of caution here: Some people who profess to be Pagan have used Paganism as an excuse to do whatever they want without any sense of responsibility at all. Some people who profess to be Pagan have used it as an excuse for reprehensible sexual conduct. Obviously, these people are frauds as human beings, and they are shams at being Pagan. As much as it pains me to say this, you may run into someone like this if you get out into the Pagan community.

Does this make Pagans terrible people? No. It just means that Pagans are people. As there are with almost every other group or organization of people on the planet, there are bound to be a few bad apples in the barrel. Hopefully, you have already learned how to recognize these people, and you can use those practical skills to recognize them anywhere.

COMMON SENSE IS ITS OWN KIND OF MAGICK

Being Pagan does not mean that you abandon all the practical skills and teachings you have already accumulated in your life. You incorporate your newly recognized spiritual beliefs into your existing life. Slowly or quickly, your life will change somewhat. For example, being Pagan does not mean that you immediately go out and acquire a whole new wardrobe, redecorate your whole house, abandon all your old friends and acquaintances, or run off and join some sort of circus, unless this is actually what you want to do! As most people have, you have probably learned some very valuable things about life and living. These intrinsic lessons are just as applicable in the Pagan community as anywhere else.

As a Pagan, you will undergo a journey of personal growth and exploration. What you learn on this journey will have applications to your life, and it may change your outlook about things, change how you value certain things, and help you live the life you already have. Then again, some Pagan folks have completely altered their lives. These choices are entirely yours to make, and no one can make them for you. If you decide to give up your old life and go live on land held communally by an established Pagan group, look at it this way: For centuries, people have left their homes and families to become nuns and priests. It simply is not all that different.

I NEED TO TALK TO SOMEONE ABOUT ALL OF THIS

All this is great, you say, but who can I talk to about this? Please use your common sense here. Who you confess your Paganism to obviously depends on how open-minded your family, friends, and acquaintances are. If you have a feeling that your Paganism is not going to be well received by your existing network, then you should think twice about announcing it to them. We call this “coming out.” If you have friends and family members who you believe will understand, who you believe will be sympathetic or supportive, then talk to them. Who knows? They may be Pagan themselves. They may be Pagan-curious. They may be Pagan-friendly. Trust and common sense are the issues here.

For those people who do not have a network of friends and relations who are going to be open-minded about this, coming out as a Pagan can be a harrowing experience. If you are a minor and living at home, you have to weigh the

potential consequences, such as being thrown out, being put into therapy, or being sent to a school of your parents' choosing. If you are of age and still living at home, you also have to weigh the potential consequences, such as being thrown out of the house. If you are of age and not living at home, you still have to weigh the potential consequences, such as never being welcome in your parents' home again. As sad as all this sounds, all of these things have happened to Pagans.

Of course, Pagans have also been met with love, understanding, tolerance, and respect from their families and their friends. It is very hard to say to anyone "do this and do that" when trying to come out as a Pagan because circumstances vary so widely. Only you can determine whether it is right for you to come out and when to come out and to whom you should come out.

In the meantime, do you have a computer? There are Pagan chat rooms, bulletin boards, and Web sites. You can network with Pagans from all over the world in this manner. If you find other Pagans living in your area, then you will be in your element. You can share these concerns with them. If there is one thing Pagans love, it is to share their experiences with other Pagans!

EXPRESSING YOUR PAGANISM IS AS EASY AS PETTING THE DOG

How do you spiritually express yourself as a Pagan? Almost any way you want to.

There are Pagan artists, musicians, clothiers, dancers, story-tellers, poets, cooks, gardeners, performance artists, singers, interior designers, and so on. People find ways to express their Pagan spirituality through simple prayer:



“Hello, (god/goddess of choice). This is me. Can we talk for a little bit?” People find ways to express their Pagan spirituality by carefully planning a garden, by singing songs, by dancing, by chanting, by drumming, by hiking in the woods, by swimming in a lake, by walking barefoot in the rain, by throwing snowballs, or by hugging their dog. Some of this may sound over-simplistic, but that is its beauty.

One of the ways through which I express my Pagan spirituality is through my relationship with my dogs, who

are collies. My mother raises pedigreed collies. I have grown up with the energy, magick, and healing medicine of these close wolf kin all my life. It is no wonder that I am fascinated by wolves or that Anubis is my patron god. When my 10-year-old collie male puts his head in my lap, I feel connected to all the wolf and canid energy in the Universe. Hugging and petting my collie friend Talley becomes not only something that I do to make him and me feel great, but it also becomes an expression of gratitude and love to the wolf and canid energy in the Universe. Eventually, this zings around the Universe, picks up more power, and comes home to me. Thus, I feel surrounded, enveloped in, and protected by canid spirits and gods all the time.

If you are concerned that you must now be doing something to express your Paganism, sit back and do one of the things that Pagans do best: have a cup of tea or coffee and just relax. There is nothing that you *must* do. There are a variety of things that you *can* do, as a practical Pagan, if you are so inclined to do them. Chances are, you are probably already doing things that are Pagan-oriented. With a little redirection of energy and thought, your life can become *very* Pagan-oriented!

DO I HAVE TO JOIN SOMETHING NOW?

Another area of potential concern for people newly awakened to their Paganism is the choice of a particular path or tradition. What am I talking about? Imagine for a moment that you are Christian. What particular type of Christianity do you profess, or which particular church do you belong to? Are you a Methodist, a Lutheran, a

Catholic, or a Presbyterian? Okay, so you are a Pagan. Which path or tradition are you going to follow? Wicca? Reconstructionist Celt? Asatru? Scottish Diaspora? Druid? What?

Many people feel pressured at the outset to choose a particular path. Must you do this?

No. You do not have to do this. The practical Pagan knows that he or she is free to explore, to read about, and to experience as many different paths and traditions as he or she chooses. You may be reading a book about Alexandrian Wicca, and perhaps the subject leaves you utterly unmoved. Do not panic. Finish the book for the sake of the education that it gives you, and do not worry about it. In another week, you may pick up a book that focuses on the Church of All Worlds and be totally turned on.

However, I would caution you against doing something rash, such as joining the first group of Pagan Whatevers that you find. Do not behave like some irrational groupie. Use your common sense! The practical Pagan knows that joining groups, clubs, and so on can involve some heavy commitments. Don't make them unless you know exactly what you are doing and what you are getting yourself into.

Research your likes and your dislikes. Think about the aspects of a path or a tradition that attract you. Ask yourself why they attract you. The answers will probably have much to do with your spiritual needs and desires. Educate yourself about those paths and traditions that strike a resonant chord in you. If, after some research and self-education, you are still turned on, then network with some of these people and see how you feel after that. You

should not feel pressured to join any circle, coven, tradition, or organization in which you are not completely comfortable, at peace, and at home. Joining is something that should occur voluntarily because a person understands what he or she is joining, because he or she accepts the responsibilities that invariably come with joining anything, and because he or she makes the conscious choice to accept the responsibilities and still wants to join!

In short, joining an organization is a big step. If you choose to take it, then do so with all sobriety and reverence. Such an undertaking should only be attempted after you have a complete understanding of the organization and some knowledge of its tenets, principles, and rules. You should also be familiar with the people. You should be comfortable with all this before you say, “I do.”

IN PAGANISM, SOME MUNDANE TERMS ARE NOT MUNDANE

Pagans often get confused over terms such as *magick*, *circle*, and *ritual*. They scratch their heads and ask me what these things are. As you have probably figured out by now, definitions cause Pagans quite a bit of consternation. For every Pagan, it seems that definitions and applications vary. Let us explore each of these topics a bit.

Magick

Very simply put, magick is the application of energy to achieve a desired end. How the energy is applied can be very elaborate. It can be done with a lot of magickal stuff. Pagans love magickal stuff: herbs, candles, crystals, athames, chalices, cauldrons, and so on. It can also be done without any stuff at all. The energy can be manipulated by

a group of people, or one person can manipulate it. There are plenty of solitary Witches and magicians out there.

Solitaires, solitaires, and the like are Pagan folk who operate on their own; they do not belong to any particular coven, group, circle, organization, and so on.

The energy can be manipulated on certain days of the month, at particular moon phases, or while the planets are at certain angles. The energy can be manipulated completely within the practitioner's head or in the form of some ritualistic passion play/drama. There are many choices regarding the use and practice of magick. However, the manner in which one practices magick or, for that matter, whether one practices magick at all, is all in the realm of personal preference. What most energy users/magicians/Witches will tell you, oh would-be manipulator of time and circumstance is this: Know your stuff. Do not practice magick willy-nilly. It requires time, attention, and discipline. Manipulating time, energy, and circumstances is demanding work; it can be physically, emotionally, and psychically exhausting. It requires that you take care of both your physical and astral body. It also requires a certain amount of "thinking ahead" on your part. You need to think about the ultimate consequences of your actions. In short, you have to think about something and/or someone other than yourself.

Magick done in a slipshod or slovenly manner not only turns out bad—akin to mayonnaise left out in the sun—but it can also cause problems that other people have to cope with. It can create messes that other people have to clean up. So, as with anything else, be responsible about how you practice magick. (The specifics of magickal practice have been the subject matter of numerous other books and will not be addressed here.)

Circle

What is a “circle” or what does it mean “to circle” with a group of people? Let us look first at the noun: a circle. A circle can refer to a group of people who meet and celebrate their spirituality together. In this context, a circle is something akin to a parish, a congregation, or a prayer group. A circle can refer to the geometric position that Pagans assume when they celebrate their spirituality together. It can be compared to how people sit in pews that are lined up across the church on the two sides of the aisle. A circle can refer to the activities that the celebrating Pagans are collectively undertaking when they come together; thus, a group of Pagans are “in circle” together.

As a verb, “to circle” means for Pagans to celebrate together, pray together, perform magick together, and/or be in ritual together. It refers to the actual doing of the activities that the Pagans have come together for. Thus, a group of like-minded Pagans will “circle” together.

Ritual

What is “ritual?” Ritual is a form of spiritual expression. It is akin to the mass celebrated by Catholics or to the Sunday service celebrated by Protestant denominations. In much the same way, Pagans come together and perform ritual either together or singularly. In and through ritual, Pagans create a means of expressing their spirituality, of communicating with their deities, of celebrating their beliefs, of performing magick, and of manifesting what is in their hearts. Ritual usually involves a series of non-mundane activities, such as casting a circle, invoking a deity, evoking an Elemental spirit, or blessing bread. Some of these non-mundane activities can be performed the same way every time without variation. Some of these

non-mundane activities can be performed a different way every time; this is part of what it means to be eclectic.

Ritual has elements of pageantry in it; that is, ritual has a theatrical aspect to it. It is out of the ordinary; it is non-mundane; it is somewhat fantastic and appeals to the senses. These are also the same things that make ritual so much fun and so rewarding. Ritual can be created on the spot; it can be planned ahead of time; it can be done from a specified script; it can be completely improvised. Again, these are all matters of personal preference and belief, but these are choices that the individual Pagan gets to make. These are not decisions made from on high or that are handed down out of the pulpit. This sort of freedom is what draws many people to Paganism in the first place.

Again, if what we are discussing here strikes a resonant cord in you, chances are you are probably Pagan!

SHOULD I BE FRIGHTENED?

Some Pagans are quite fearful about their safety and the safety of their loved ones. They fear for their jobs and for their right to be secure in their own homes. This is not a book about legal advice, but there are some general considerations that should be taken into account.

First, the United States Constitution guarantees that the federal government shall not establish any religion. State constitutions further establish that no state government may establish any religion. The federal and state constitutions also assert that no government shall deprive any person of life, liberty, property, or the pursuit of happiness without due process of law.

Governments are made up of human beings, however, and these human beings sometimes make terrible errors

in judgment and attempt to legislate spirituality. This is a violation of constitutional law. Attempts by the government to legislate spirituality must be tested in the court system. If you believe that you have an issue regarding freedom of religion or that the line between government and the establishment of religion has been transgressed in your case, then you will have to make a decision about whether you are willing to stand up for yourself. It may involve going to court. In some cases, the American Civil Liberties Union can help, but in most cases, it will be up to you to obtain private legal representation and proceed with your case. (See the American Civil Liberties Union Web site at www.aclu.org.)

The federal courts themselves have specifically recognized Wicca, which is a Pagan spiritual path, as deserving of First Amendment protection.⁴ State supreme courts have also recognized Wicca as a legitimate religion deserving of First Amendment constitutional protection and status.⁵

The IRS and the United States Army also recognize Wicca. The IRS and various state revenue departments countenance Wiccan and Pagan churches and religious organizations as 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporations. The U.S. Army's *Handbook for Chaplains* has a subsection entitled "Wicca" that can be found in a section of the *Handbook* entitled, "Introduction: Individually Distinctive Groups." Thus, Wicca has a place in the *Handbook for Chaplains* together with Christians, Jews, Indians, Muslims, Japanese Heritage Groups, and all sorts of other religions. (The text can be found at the following Web address: www-cgsc.army.mil/chap/relpractice/other/wicca.htm.)

In an e-mail posted to OurFreedom@OneList.com on June 29, 1999, Oberon Zell of *Green Egg* magazine notes

that “The Church of All Worlds received its Federal 501 (c)(3) charter from the IRS on June 18, 1970, after having been incorporated as a Pagan Church in the state of Missouri on March 4, 1968. CAW is a fully legal Pagan Church in every sense of the word, at the state and Federal level, in the United States and Australia (Nov. 20, 1992).” Currently in the state of Missouri, the Omnistic Fellowship has 501 (c)(3) status, which it obtained in December 1990. Even in the conservative Midwest, Pagan organizations are legal, flourishing, and thriving.



The rights of Pagans are being litigated in courts today. In 1999, Crystal Seifferly, a 17-year-old honor student in the Lincoln Park School District of Detroit, Michigan, sued the Detroit public school system over her right to wear the symbol of her Wiccan faith: the pentacle. In order to pursue the litigation, this young woman procured the help of the American Civil Liberties Union and The Witches' Anti-discrimination League.

(WADL is now the Alternative Religious Education Network, or AREN.) Eventually, the Defendant School District offered the young woman a settlement that was approved by the federal judge hearing the case. A consent judgment was entered that allowed Crystal to wear her pentacle.⁶

It seems almost axiomatic that in America, if Christian students get to wear their crosses and if Jewish students get to wear their Stars of David, then Witches and Wiccans get to wear their pentacles. As the Detroit litigation proves, however, some rights still must be fought for. Why? Because there are still some members of mainstream society who seek to impose their values on everyone else.

In short, religious discrimination does exist. Then again, discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation, and race exists despite all legal proscriptions to the contrary. Modern America is probably the most free society that has ever existed in terms of an individual's personal beliefs and practices, whatever they are. Still, modern Americans are just human beings. As such, they are subject to their personal biases, prejudices, and agendas. Time, education, courage, and love—when combined—are a potent recipe for change.

PAGANS ARE THE VICTIMS OF SOME TRULY BAD, BUT TRULY EFFECTIVE, PUBLICITY

Despite the Emancipation Proclamation, the Civil War, and the racial turbulence that erupted in the 1960s, Americans have been unable to completely eradicate racial discrimination.

Even though women got the vote in the early 1900s, there are still some very chauvinistic and misogynist views

about women in our society. Paganism is no different, and we have been getting some really bad press since the declining years of the Roman Empire! Let's face it: Sensational events such as the Inquisition, which lasted several hundred years, and the Salem Witch trials, which occurred just two brief centuries ago, have not gone a long way in promoting a positive public image of Pagans. It is not easy to reverse several thousand years of truly heinous publicity, especially when the modern media machine, the music industry, evangelical preachers, Christian-based TV, and Hollywood still promote a positively medieval view of Pagans, wherein Pagans are negatively (and falsely) depicted.

People still ask me really, really stupid questions, such as, "Do Pagans eat children?"

These people could use a dose of common sense themselves. They have read one too many Grimm fairy tales! They are obviously not aware that once, Christians were accused of cannibalism, and they probably do not know that for centuries, Christians accused Jews of cannibalism. This taboo has, apparently, not lost its popularity in the name-calling arena.

I am also asked if modern Pagans practice human sacrifice. The answer to these ludicrous questions is, obviously, no. Anyone who claims that their coven or spiritual leaders did this or made them do it is a) not being truthful; b) in need of serious psychiatric care; or c) not part of any known, recognized, or legitimate Pagan tradition. I have seen alleged ex-members of alleged ex-covens make claims such as this on television without offering one shred of corroborating, objective proof and without bringing in the very people they are accusing. One wonders where people get such idiotic notions.

Obviously, the propaganda of the Inquisition, which was established somewhere between 1233 and 1252 A.D. and not officially abolished until the 1700s, has proven very powerful. This stuff is still believed by many people! The music, movie, and television industries, together with the press, media, and evangelical types, still play into this obsolete mode of thought. Their combined irresponsible treatment of Paganism continues to perpetuate an archaic public image of Pagans that was initially born out of uncontrolled fear, manipulative sexual repression, and vicious misogyny.

However, as we have seen in general, sex and violence make big dollars. No one wants to see how normal a Witch's life or a Druid's life can really be. No one will pay the price of a movie ticket or a CD for that. No one stays up late at night to watch normalcy on TV. What they will pay for, pay attention to, and internalize, though, is some grotesque form of hack and slash that masquerades ever so thinly as occultism, magick, or Paganism.

Other sources of the poor Pagan public image are sensational criminal events such as the Manson murders in the 1960s and the case of the West Memphis Three in the 1990s. In August 1969, followers of Charles Manson murdered Sharon Tate and her guests at the Roman Polanski home in California, in a case that had heavy occult overtones. In 1993, three 8-year-old boys were murdered; their alleged killers were three male adolescents, collectively known as The West Memphis Three. This case had heavy overtones of occultism, magick, and Witchcraft. (For further education on the West Memphis Three case, go to www.religioustolerance.org/ra_robin.htm.) The acts of individuals such as Charles Manson and his followers are not those of the modern Pagan. These people are no more Pagan than the Inquisitors were Christian. Similarly, just

because a teenager keeps a journal with pentacles and spells in it does not make him or her the perpetrator of a heinous crime. Someone's interest in the occult does not automatically translate into criminal behavior.

In short, I do not know of any legitimate modern Pagan tradition that condones or encourages murder, torture, assault, battery, rape, molestation, pedophilia, cannibalism, or necrophilia. Yet, public prosecutors, self-styled "experts," certain religious leaders, and certain religious zealots want to hang Pagan labels on these sorts of behavior, as if only Pagans would engage in them. After all, an overwhelming number of murders, war, and mass slaughter have been perpetrated in the name of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Other sources of the poor Pagan image can be found in certain Biblical passages, which are played upon by members of mainstream religions. I have seen a number of television programs wherein incredible claims are made about modern Pagans. These claims border on slander, and these programs usually do not offer one shred of objective or corroborating evidence that supports these tales and stories. The individuals coming forth with these tales and stories do not name names, have not sworn out affidavits or subpoenas, and have presented only one-sided tales.

However, for those who want to believe, it is all too easy to believe, and they do believe.

Wiccans, for example, repeat over and over again that they do not believe in the Christian Devil, yet are painted time and time again by certain Christian sects as Devil-worshippers. It has become painfully obvious that to such Christian sects, any god other than their God represents Satan, and so, by bizarre reasoning, the Goddess and the God represent Satan to these individuals. One might,

therefore, suppose that Buddha, Mohammed, or Vishnu also represents Satan to these people.

How does one cope with this sort of thing? When asked ridiculous and pathetic questions that are obviously the result of ignorance and lack of education, I take a few deep breaths, pray silently to the Goddess for patience, and respond succinctly and truthfully. Then again, I have come to recognize that in certain circumstances, there is nothing that I can say to my questioners that will have any meaning or that will make any sense, so intent are they to either “convert” me or to malign me and my beliefs. The practical Pagan learns to recognize the conversation that can make a difference and the conversation that is an exercise in futility. When confronted with futility, I simply respond that my personal spiritual beliefs are just that: personal, and I do not wish to discuss them.

THERE IS SCARY STUFF IN ALMOST ALL SPIRITUAL TRADITIONS

Believe it or not, some people still think that Pagans commit human sacrifice to appease their gods and that Pagans are cannibals because they supposedly eat children. Such accusations are nothing new. As Jeffrey Russell points out in *A History of Witchcraft: Sorcerers, Heretics, and Pagans*, the Syrians thought that Jews made human sacrifice and ate children; the Romans thought that the Christians made human sacrifice and ate children; and the Christians thought that the Gnostics made human sacrifice and ate children.⁷

The truth of it is that there is mythos in most religions that tends to support such beliefs. For example, Jehovah commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac, but then changed his mind at the last minute. The Roman view of

the gods included a Titan named Cronus who swallowed his children to avoid a mutiny by them. Jehovah sacrificed his only son Jesus on a wooden cross to save humanity. Modern Catholics still believe in the miracle of transubstantiation: The communion wafer becomes the body of Christ, and the communion wine becomes the blood of Christ. Thus, modern Catholics eat Jesus every day, and no one gives it a second thought.

There are some modern Pagans who hold fast to some ancient mythos, and some of it is not for the faint of heart. For example, in the Norse pantheon, according to Freya Aswynn's book *Leaves of Yggdrasil: A Synthesis of Runes, Gods, Magic, Feminine Mysteries, and Folklore*, the god Odin exchanges one of his eyes for knowledge of time in its triple aspect: the past, the present, and the future. He hangs on the tree yggdrasil for nine days to gain knowledge of the runes. In *Eight Sabbats for Witches and Rites for Birth, Marriage, and Death* Janet and Stewart Farrar note that, among some Alexandrian Wiccans, the holly king slays the oak king at midsummer, and the oak king slays the holly king at Yule. These two kings are brothers. Modern worshippers of the ancient Egyptian god Osiris and the goddess Isis still adhere to the Isis and Osiris myth that E. A. Wallis Budge notes in *The Gods of The Egyptians, Volume I*: Osiris is slain and dismembered by his brother Seth, but is resurrected by Isis.

It should be obvious to anyone who actually studies religious mythos that most religions are not fluffy business. Hidden in these frightening myths are stories of sacrifice, love, trust, enlightenment, devotion, and survival. As with any great truth, one must look beneath the surface of the myths to find the meanings hidden in them. Modern Paganism encourages such exploration and study.

No one should be afraid of knowledge. In Paganism, knowledge is for everyone, and learning is a lifelong endeavor that is strongly encouraged.

Unfortunately, one of the last permissible taboos in our allegedly educated society is the act of falsely representing Pagans to the public. As more Pagans openly oppose this sort of misrepresentation, by whomever it is perpetrated, we slowly disassemble the bad public image and misrepresentations made about us and promulgated over the centuries right up to the present time.

SO WHAT IS THE ANSWER HERE?

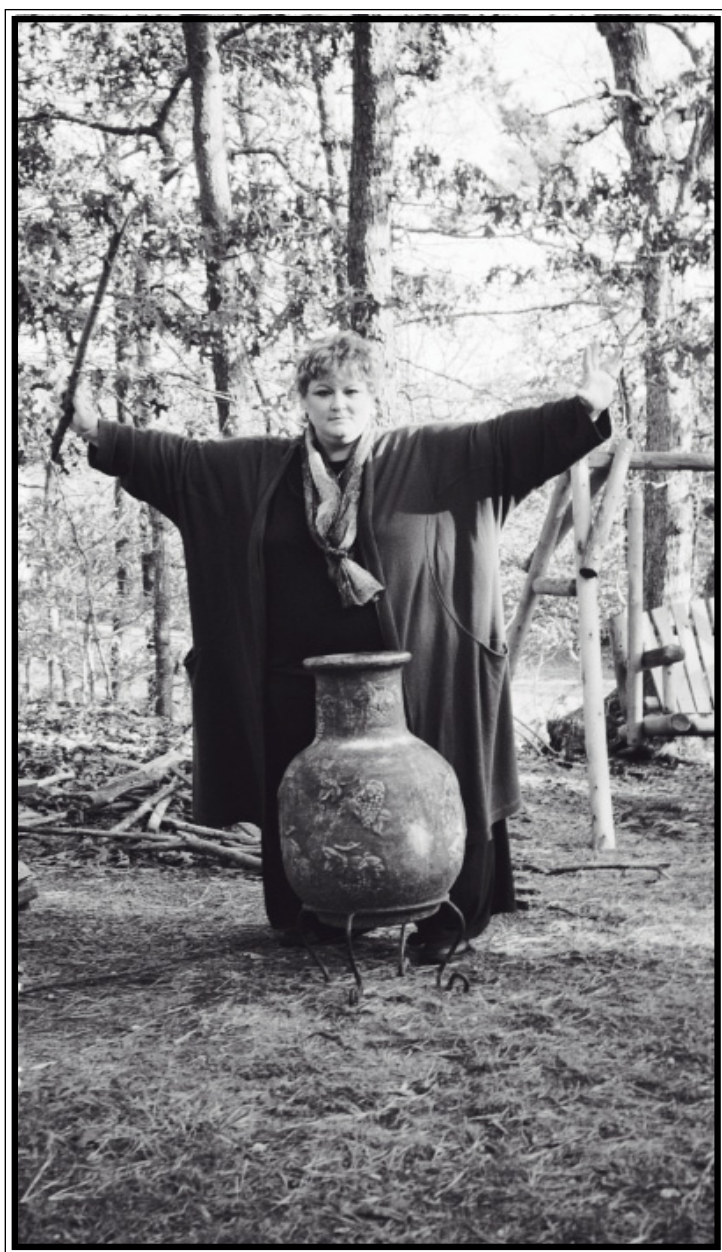
Should you be afraid of being a Pagan? This is a difficult question. Theoretically and ideally, the answer is, “No. I live in America, and freedom of religion is guaranteed to me by both the federal and state constitutions, by federal law, and by state law.” Unfortunately, one has only to read the “Lady Liberty League” section of *Circle Network News* to understand that religious freedom, as is any other freedom, is something that still has to be fought for, defended, and aggressively sought in some situations.

Let me say this to you, however. I lived for years in a conservative town in the conservative Midwest. I had a job. I was—and still am—a taxpayer. I am a home-owner. I keep my property and my affairs in good order. I pay my taxes, take a bath daily, and conduct myself responsibly in the world at large. No one has personally attacked me, nor have I lost my job based on religious discrimination. No one has threatened my person or my property based on my religion. Although I am divorced, I have no children, so I have not had to defend my religious beliefs in a child custody case, as some Pagans have had to do.

The practical Pagan understands that one day, it might become necessary to defend one's Paganism in court. If you have been threatened in any way, if acts of libel and of slander have been committed against you, or if you have lost your job, your home, or your children due to some sort of perceived religious discrimination, then the practical Pagan procures competent legal counsel and sorts it out. Other avenues of representation may include the ACLU or help from savvy folks online.

If we, as a group, put up with discrimination, then we have no one but ourselves to blame for its continued existence. There is no better time than now to be Pagan and Proud. There may be some very real concerns regarding "coming out" (which we will address later in the book), but if there are real threats to your person, your home, your family, and your income, then you might want to consider legal counsel and assistance.

Based on my own personal experience, I say this to you: If you conduct yourself well in your everyday life, most people will support your right to make a personal choice about who you pray to or whether you pray at all. There is no reason to panic or react with hysteria and despair to the realization that you are Pagan. Take a deep breath. Make sure you have paid your bills this month. Have a bran muffin and some herbal tea. We can now move on to the next chapter.



CHAPTER 3

Are There Any Rules?

Many Pagans have come to me and have asked to see the Ten Commandments of Paganism, *The Miss Manners Handbook of Paganism*, or some version of *The Rules*. What is hard for many Pagans—newly professed or long-standing—to understand is that there is no cohesive set of published rules anywhere that purport to be *The Manual of Appropriate Pagan Behavior*. This book is no different, no matter what I said in that other chapter.

So are there any rules? No, but there are some very good guidelines for how to conduct oneself. Do you get to act like an idiot? Well, you can if you want to; however, you will be joined only by other rude and oafish clods, because no one else will be able to tolerate you.

COMMON COURTESY IS ITS OWN

KIND OF MAGICK

Hopefully, we have all learned that “please” and “thank you” are part of the human language and behavior for some very good reasons. Good manners and common courtesy

are much appreciated in the mundane world. They are also very much appreciated in the Pagan environment. As I tell people at *Conversations With Pagans*, raise your hand if you want to talk; be respectful of the person who has the floor and who is currently talking; do not raise your voice; do not interrupt someone who is speaking; and wait your turn. Profanity is usually a bad idea. Swearing at people shows a lack of respect, an inability to use the language well, and a complete loss of self-control.

This all probably sounds like something we learned in kindergarten, and we should have learned it in kindergarten. It is amazing how many people did not, and those people come from everywhere, not just the Pagan venue. If you did not learn these sorts of manners as a child, take heed now. If you learned them as a child but for some reason you forgot them or do not think that they apply to you, please think again. The practical Pagan practices good manners wherever she or he goes.

Other forms of good manners are also appreciated. Take table manners, for instance.

Unless you are at a special feast or festival where eating with your fingers is *de rigeur*, silverware and plates are usually more than a form of table decoration. They are meant to be utilized and not just to be looked at. The practices of cramming your mouth with food, talking while your mouth is full, and eating as though you are in a race are not only repugnant to the eye and the ear; these practices are down and outright dangerous. Didn't your mother warn you about this when you were a kid? You think this was only some maternal control issue? Behavior such as this can cause choking with death following very shortly thereafter. If you are lucky, someone that you are eating with knows the Heimlich maneuver and can save you.

However, it is best to avoid this possibility; eat in moderate bites, chew the food well, swallow, and then talk.

Drinking to excess until you are vomiting in public or slobbering over the object of your affection is neither attractive nor mature. In fact, it only makes you look like the tail end of a horse. Trust me: This is not the end of this powerful totem creature that you want to emulate.

Generally speaking, ritual and magick should be performed while one is sober. Exceptions to this rule, as with most rules, do exist. If the ritual is one celebrating the Greek god of the vine or the pleasures of wine, then the ritual may require a certain level of drunkenness. Even so, these rituals are not just excuses to get drunk. In fact, these rituals are really serious business for their facilitators, who are usually very experienced with this sort of celebration. There will be a protocol for the event prepared for the participants ahead of time, and the ritual will actually be very carefully planned.

There is a misconception out there that all Pagans love to hug and kiss everyone. This is not necessarily the case. Although Pagans are generally a very warm, expressive group of people, there are still certain boundaries that apply, and the practical Pagan will look for them. Don't just drape yourself over everyone you meet like an old quilt. If you have met someone particularly huggable for the first time, try to ask him or her if you can hug him before you do it. Never take anything for granted. Sexual caresses or touching of the genitals or breasts can be easily misinterpreted and are often the subject of bitter complaint among the Pagan folk. Refrain from acts carrying sexual overtones unless you have been expressly invited.

Taking things or touching things that do not belong to you is impolite and shows a certain lack of respect. In some instances, these sorts of behaviors can land you in jail or make you the defendant in a civil lawsuit. Aside from this, there is a special point of Pagan etiquette to be made here: Do not touch someone's magickal items, amulets, talismans, tarot cards, jewelry, and so forth unless you have the express permission of the owner. To be grabby and to touch what was not ensorcelled by you or for you may drain or contaminate the magick. This will, most assuredly, anger or insult the owner of said magickal/ritual item.

If you reach out to touch or grab such an item, its owner will probably stop you. Do not be foolhardy and try to touch it anyway. Stop what you were about to do. Apologize and then ask if it would be permissible for you to touch the thing that has so entranced you. Do not be surprised or offended if you are told "no." Some items were worked on with great love, effort, and care. They were not meant to be handled by anyone other than their owner, and you should be able to respect this sort of effort without taking it personally and being offended. Do not grasp or touch another Pagan's jewelry without asking first. Do not touch altars or the items on those altars unless you ask first. Chances are, these items have been magickally empowered or dedicated, and touching them will somehow affect the magick with which they are imbued.

In short, pawing other Pagans and/or their stuff is impolite and just plain disrespectful. Perhaps most of all, Pagans want respect. They should have that from their fellow Pagans most of all.

NEVER UNDERESTIMATE THE VALUE OF SOAP AND HOT WATER

Hygiene and cleanliness are marvelous things. Unlike the poor Christians during the years of the Bubonic Plague, members of modern society know that cleanliness and good personal hygiene not only diminish the risks of many diseases, but also make their adherents a joy to be around. In short, everyone should make use of hot water and soap on a daily basis.

Even if you believe that modern deodorants are harmful, there are natural and organic methods of diminishing underarm odor that are available (for example, the deodorant stones). No amount of patchouli oil will cover up the stink of flesh that has remained unwashed over several days or the reek of unclean clothes and bed linens. The practical Pagan understands that being dirty and smelling bad will not endear you to very many people. No one will want to stand next to you in ritual, sit next to you in a class, eat with you, or want you in their home or in their bed. Keep your clothing similarly clean and nicely appearing.

Most pre-Christian, Pagan people highly valued cleanliness and personal hygiene. Ritual washing and bathing were important in these traditions. Make these practices an important part of your everyday rituals.

OBEYING THE LAW IS FOR EVERYONE

This book does not purport to be a manual of free legal advice; however, obeying the law is a good thing. I was a practicing lawyer for nearly 17 years, and keeping

behavior within the confines of the law is something that I heartily endorse.

Alcohol consumption is for adults according to the law, and this means that unless you are 21 years of age, drinking will not be for you at Pagan events and gatherings. If you are in a spiritual observance group and if your rituals and practices involve the consumption of alcohol, please be advised that serving liquor to minors usually carries a criminal penalty, and you should be prepared to be accountable for your actions.

Certain drugs are illegal. If you own them, use them, possess them, or merely have them in your house, you could land in a jail cell and/or lose your house, if you own it. If you are willing to accept these consequences and participate in a tradition or ritual where the use of certain drugs occurs, then please be advised that this conduct places you at risk for arrest. As of this writing, there is a very narrow class of individuals protected by federal statute regarding the use of peyote in their rituals. Unless you are a Native American Indian who is a member of this federally protected class, then illegal drug use is just that: illegal drug use. Generally speaking, the majority of Pagans recognizes and respects the laws of the culture at large—that is, drug use is not widely practiced, and in many circles, it is frowned upon and discouraged.

Keeping that in mind, be aware that in the traditions that encompass the ritual use of illegal drugs for purposes of magick or the expansion of consciousness, the rules and expectations regarding that drug use are usually fairly precise and well established. This means that for Pagans who do utilize drugs in a ritualistic, magickal, or ceremonial fashion, their drug usage is not merely a matter of recreation and escapism. For these Pagans, ritualistic drug

use is a true path to enlightenment, much as the use of peyote is to certain Native American spiritual traditions. Let me stress that Paganism is not an excuse to engage in illegal activity and then claim protection under the First Amendment. It does not work that way, and the quicker we all understand that, the better off we will be.

Trespassing onto the private property of other individuals shows a lack of respect for the property owner and will also probably get you at least an interview with local law enforcement officials if you are caught. This has happened to people I know.

If you have found some wonderful place to perform ritual or to perform magick, you should do the necessary background checking in order to protect both yourself and anyone else who is going to do the work with you. Although you might be willing to accept the consequences of trespassing, do not assume that everyone else in your spiritual observance group or magickal circle is willing to be interviewed by the police along with you.

Find out who owns the property, make polite inquiry as to whether you can use the property, make fair disclosure about what you are using the property for, and make the necessary arrangements. The excuse of *If I do all this, I won't get to the use the property* is just that: an excuse. Sometimes, the real lesson is in the process and not in the end result.

Similarly, the use of public parks must be handled according to the rules. Just because you are Pagan does not give you carte blanche to avail yourself of public parks after closing time. If the sign says that the park closes at 10, then take your brooms and skeedaddle by 10, or else be prepared to explain yourself to the park ranger when he comes around.

If your group wants to use a public park for a Pagan event, observance, or gathering, you will probably have to go to the agency or administration that has jurisdiction over the park and make an application to use it. So does everyone else. This does not mean that you are being discriminated against. It just means that you have to wait your turn, play nice, and play by the same rules that the park authority expects out of everyone. If, after you disclose the nature of what you will be doing, you are charged a fee in excess of a posted, public fee or a fee in excess of what you know the Smith Family Reunion was charged, then you have an argument for discriminatory treatment.

Nudity in public places will not be countenanced, unless you are at a specially designated nude beach or nudist camp. Sexual acts in public places will not be countenanced period. The use of anything viewed as a weapon (sword, dagger, athame, spear, and so on) in public places will not be countenanced. The president of the NRA does not get to run down the street stark naked waving his gun about. You don't get to run down the street stark naked waving your ritual blade about. The First Amendment will not clothe either of you.

Public drunkenness and excessive loud noise will not be countenanced whether you are at home or not. Over the years, the police have visited several of my parties for being in violation of local noise ordinances. If someone gets drunk at your house or at a party that you are giving on liquor that you provide and then has an accident, you could be liable for the consequences in a court of law.

There are certain actions that will distance you from every legitimate, modern Pagan path that I can think of. Acts such as thievery, assault, battery, murder, rape, torture, sex with minors, or emotional and physical abuse are

not components of any legitimate modern Pagan practice that I know of. Non-consensual acts are not the building blocks of any modern Pagan tradition. I do not know of a single, legitimate Pagan tradition practiced today that advocates or condones these things. Any so-called “Pagan tradition” that encourages such acts is dangerous. The practical Pagan will recognize that any alleged tradition that incorporates such acts into its practice is not a spiritually safe place. The reasonable course of action is to put plenty of distance between yourself and such a tradition. Acts such as thievery, assault, battery, murder, rape, torture, molestation, pedophilia, and emotional and physical abuse are no-brainers. You don’t do these things—period.

However, if by some strange turn of circumstances you find that you are involved with any alleged Pagans or alleged Pagan traditions that exhort, condone, or support these things, I strongly recommend that you get the heck out of Dodge and put some distance between you and these people! These folks are probably not Pagans; they are probably people with some very serious psychological problems who are going to wind up in a jail cell. You do not want to be keeping company with them. You do not want to be their victim, either. You do not want someone else to be the victim of your poor choices and your inability to stand up for yourself.

YIKES! DO PAGANS EVER GET TO HAVE ANY FUN?

For years, the height of summer in St. Louis, Missouri, has included the Pagan Picnic. This is a two-day Pagan gathering held in one of the most prestigious parks in the

city. The organizers of this event have always endeavored to comply with all park requests and regulations. There have been no problems, and this gathering of more than a thousand Pagans has become a regular part of the St. Louis summer landscape. The policy has been no weapons, no drinking, no drugs, and no nudity. Everyone gets along just fine, and the event has received very favorable publicity over the years. Most everyone has a perfectly marvelous time. For a listing of Pagan festivals held in the United States, please go online to The Witches' Voice (www.witchvox.net/xevents.html).

WHERE DO I LOOK FOR POSITIVE SUGGESTIONS REGARDING MY BEHAVIOR?

Most Pagan traditions have maxims or points of honor to which they adhere. For example, if you are looking for codes of behavior involving the Asatru or Norse Pagan traditions, you could look at Web sites or read some of the books authored by Norse writers to get a good picture of acceptable behavior within these traditions.

Many Pagan traditions adhere to a Wiccan maxim known as The Rede, which states "An' it harm none, do as you will." This maxim has become a part of the behavioral, moral, and ethical structure for many Pagans. (Then again, some Pagans ignore The Rede entirely.)

Comparatively speaking, The Rede is somewhat akin to the Golden Rule, which states "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Essentially, The Rede tells us to think before we do! If what we are about to do (or not do) is going to have bad effects or bad consequences, then we should, at least, think twice before acting or not acting. The Rede teaches us that if, after having thought

about it, we determine that there will be bad effects or consequences, then we should forego that which we were about to do or not do in favor of another course of action or inaction.

It is true that if one were to live The Rede in every sense of the word, then one probably would starve to death because even the act of eating salad means killing some plant. I tend to think of The Rede as an ideal that I strive toward and that I try to live up to. Being human, I am going to fail at times. Still, I keep The Rede in my head and try to weigh my actions against it at all times.

There are some Pagans who completely own their behavior, whatever the consequences.

They consider their actions and, even if the consequences will be deleterious, they do their thing anyway. These people should understand, as should you, that if one is aware of the consequences and if one takes the action that will effectuate those consequences, then there is no room for whining or complaining afterward. This is not to say that all Pagans are calculating, somewhat ruthless, and inconsiderate. One does not have to be a Pagan, necessarily, in order to be these things. Each of us probably knows plenty of non-Pagans who are calculating, somewhat ruthless, and inconsiderate! By and large, most Pagans do not act unless they think their actions out before they do them. Furthermore, they do not take actions that they are reasonably assured will harm someone else.

BEING A RESPONSIBLE ADULT IS A TOUGH JOB: PAGANISM AND YOUR EMPLOYER

As I mentioned previously, being Pagan is not an excuse for abandoning your common sense. In adult situations,

however mundane, one should still behave in an adult, rational, and reasonable manner. For example, when you go for job interviews, dress accordingly and leave the flowing-sleeved garments at home. Appropriate ritual or coffeehouse attire is not appropriate business attire. When interviewing for a job, keep your ritual jewelry at a tasteful and discreet minimum. When approaching a potential employer, one should appear as a qualified and sane candidate for the job. Being loaded down with jewelry of any kind, whether Pagan or mundane, is not suggested for a successful job interview. If you choose to wear your pentacle, ankh, or labrys openly, then be prepared to discuss it in some sort of rational manner, even it is to simply say, "It is religious in nature, and that is all I care to say."

If you put yourself out on display this way, someone might ask. That is human nature, after all. You should be prepared to answer in some manner.

However, discrimination on the basis of religion, gender, or sexual orientation is against the law. Do not think that simply saying "Hey! This is discriminatory. Cut it out," is going to protect you. Chances are, you will have to prove such discrimination in court.

So how does one handle Paganism in the workplace? Regarding job interviews, leave the Pagan jewelry at home or wear it under your clothes. After you have the job and have proven yourself over a period of time, you may slowly bring out the more tasteful Pagan jewelry. The idea here is to get the job first.

I was a practicing lawyer for years. Despite that, I had a fondness for lots of jewelry and lots of eye makeup. In my own heart of hearts, I imagined myself as a cross between Janis Joplin and an Egyptian noblewoman. Yet, when I went on job interviews, saw new clients, or got in front of

judges and juries, my “look” changed dramatically. I dressed for the part and used what was known to be successful.

In an office setting, after my intelligence and competence were established, I found that there was generally room for the more individual aspects of my personality and “look” to emerge. Still, I had to show up on time, dress accordingly, do the job expected of me, and obey the rules of the workplace. Every employer expects this of every employee. You are no different, Pagan or not.

You can also expect to get the usual holidays: Labor Day, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and so forth. Most Pagans do not request their Pagan holidays as holidays. They find other ways to take this time off from work, all within the scope of the rules. Usually, if a Pagan wants to take Samhain or some other Pagan holiday as a day off from work, he or she asks for it in advance as a vacation day or a personal day.

If you do request a Pagan holiday on the basis of religion, be prepared to eventually explain yourself to someone in authority. This also might “out” you, so think carefully about what you explain to whom in the workplace. Acclimate yourself to your work environment, and gain the trust and respect of your bosses and coworkers before you make any grandiose statements about your spirituality. Think how you would feel if someone moved into the desk next to you and began his or her work relationship with you right off by making a grand stand on his or her particular religious beliefs.

Generally speaking, deep religious conversation of any sort is inappropriate in the workplace. Most employers wish that their employees would keep their minds on their jobs and not on their personal lives. Most work schedules are designed around making money for the employer and

not around providing employees the opportunity to excessively socialize, get too personal with one another, or try to convert one another. Unless you are working in a Pagan environment or in a Pagan-friendly environment, my advice is to keep your spirituality to yourself. Most people who stand on soapboxes in their offices and make religious announcements usually are just making fools of themselves. You are there to do a job, not to make a fool out of yourself. If a co-employee asks you what religion you practice, you might politely tell him or her that your religion is a deeply personal thing that you choose not to discuss with anyone. If you are still pressed to disclose your religious preferences despite this response, politely but firmly tell the insistent individual that you view this line of questioning as an invasion of your privacy and if it continues, you will have a discussion with the boss or supervisor about it. If you are still pressed, then you should proceed directly to the boss or supervisor and calmly explain what is going on. This should be the end of the problem. You have not revealed yourself, and your coworker looks like a nosey busybody who has too much time on his or her hands.

Tell the boss that you are being pressed to discuss your religious views, which are personal and private to you. Advise the boss that you view this as a form of harassment and wish it to cease. If the boss presses you to disclose your religious preferences, tell the boss politely but firmly that your religion is a deeply personal issue that you choose not to discuss with anyone. If you are still pressed to disclose your religious preferences, calmly and rationally explain that you believe your religious preferences have no bearing or relevance on your job and that you view these questions as illegal and that you will take whatever legal action you deem necessary to protect your privacy.

If the scenario has advanced to this state, then you are probably working in an office where the majority of the folks are probably of one particular religious persuasion. They probably view anyone not of their particular religious persuasion as some sort of threat, a lost soul, or a person in need of being shown “the truth,” whatever that is. Also understand that if the scenario has advanced to this point, you can expect to have certain job issues until you are fired, you quit, or you take your case to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. In 2001, a federal postal employer sued the postmaster general of the United States Postal Service Agency (Midwest area) and alleged work harassment on the basis of his Wiccan religion and a handicap (hearing loss) and won.⁸ If you are working in a particularly religious environment where everyone is of a particular religious persuasion, you may consider leaving this position, as you will probably get nothing but grief.

As an aside, a Pagan who chooses to work with an organization of a known religious persuasion with a decidedly religious agenda should go to work there with his or her eyes wide open, mindful of possible consequences, and willing to deal with them as they occur. With the election of George W. Bush, Jr., in 2000 and the urging of the faith-based initiatives, religiously centered businesses could possess a *carte blanche* to discriminate in the hiring and firing of employees on the basis of religion. Ultimately, such programs and their practices will have to be tested in court.

If you stick it out in a work environment that is this difficult, make sure that you do everything possible to assure yourself of a good work record. Sometimes not even that will be enough, however. An employer does not

necessarily need “cause” to fire an employee, depending upon the state and depending upon the circumstances of an employee’s hiring. If you suspect that you are being singled out or set up for firing, consult an attorney who specializes in labor disputes, employment disputes, and/or contract disputes.

BEING AN ADULT IS A TOUGH JOB:

PAGANISM AND THE FAMILY

Paganism and the family is a topic akin to a hydra, which has many heads. Perhaps the most difficult of those heads involves Pagans and their children. In matters involving children and spiritual beliefs, a dispute usually begins when someone claims that a particular spiritual belief or practice is not good for the children or is not in the best interest of the children.

Am I going to lose my children?

Anyone can call the Division of Family Services (DFS) and make a report. They can lie wildly, but usually, fraudulent and unsubstantiated calls carry statutory penalties. There are classes of professionals, established by statute, who have mandatory reporting obligations—that is, they are required by statute to report abuse, neglect; conditions or circumstances that would reasonably result in abuse or neglect; or to report if they reasonably suspect abuse or neglect. Teachers and doctors fall into this class of professionals. However, any person may report abuse/neglect, suspected abuse/neglect to DFS. A call that states only, “my ex-wife is a Wiccan” will not spark an investigation. What sparks an investigation is a concomitant to the report of abuse and/or neglect. Involving a Pagan religion, it

might sound like this: “My ex-wife is a Wiccan, and she takes the children to rituals involving nudity and sex.”

Once that call is made, the Division of Family Services is required to investigate. If you remotely suspect that you are the target of a DFS investigation, or if you suspect that you are going to become the target of a DFS investigation, please consult a local attorney with experience in this area of the law. He or she can tell you best how to protect yourself and what your rights are under your state’s child protection statute.

The practical Pagan understands that, where children are concerned, there are some very basic things that look good in the face of a potential or actual investigation. First of all, make sure that your house and everything in it is clean, neat, and orderly, especially your children. As a general rule, it is good to keep one’s house and one’s children clean, neat, and orderly at all times. Most visits from the Division of Family Services are not previously announced, however.

I am aware of untidy Pagans who kept neither themselves, their homes, nor their children clean, neat, and orderly. Such folk have been known to blame later unfavorable rulings on their Paganism instead of on their own slovenliness.

Your children should be well nourished, be current with their medical and dental treatment, and have appropriate adult supervision at all times, especially if they are younger than 16. I know that asking folks to keep a tidy household and to keep tidy and well cared for children is asking a lot, but children involve the supreme sacrifice of self. After you have children, your life is not your own. Your life is your children’s lives, and if you value keeping them, then certain sacrifices and hardships must be endured. The

practical Pagan understands this and does not whine about it. In short, if someone involves the Division of Family Services in your life, or if your spouse or some other member of your family sues you for custody of your children, do not give them anything else to blame your poor parenting on. If there is going to be discrimination in child custody, let it be true discrimination by religious choice, rather than some case clouded by issues such as poor hygiene, malnourishment, and failure to give appropriate medical care.

Although definitions in states may vary, the standard generally employed regarding children and custody is this: What is in the best interests of the child? The courts look at a constellation of factors, among them financial security, the health of the child, hygiene in the home, the safety of the child, and education. Each state has its own child custody statute with its own definition of what is in the best interests of the child. According to the statute, religion may or may not play a role in defining what is in the best interests of the child. You should read your state's statute to be sure. (You can find your state statute in the law library located in the courthouse of your county seat. There is an index volume in which you can look for topic headings. If you are researching online, the Cornell law library has an excellent Web site (www.law.cornell.edu/topics/state_statutes2.html#family).

There are Pagans who will blame their Pagan traditions as the reasons why their children were placed in the custody of someone else. These people might not look to the fact that their rent went unpaid for months or that their children were on a regular diet of Saltines and Kool-Aid instead of being properly nourished. Where children are concerned, a parent can simply never be too careful regarding the care of that child.

In general, whining “Poor me! I am a Pagan. The world is against me, and they want to take my children away” may be legitimate in some circumstances, but by and large, it is an unwelcome and unpopular song to be singing where children are concerned. The practical Pagan who does not want to risk a run-in with the Division of Family Services, or take the chance of losing his or her children in a court case keeps his or her affairs, household, and children in order.

Publicity invites scrutiny. It is just that simple. Once you make a spectacle of yourself, for whatever reason, then you live in a fish bowl where everyone looks at you and makes judgments. It might not be right. It might not be fair, but that is just the way it is. So it might be a bad idea to go on television and advertise your Paganism or your alternative lifestyle. Such public statements and public actions invite scrutiny. If you make such public statements, simply be prepared for the consequential fallout. Some people feel it is necessary to make public billboards out of their lives. That is their choice. However, they do not deal well with the inevitable results of that sort of advertising. Be prepared to explain and to defend yourself, your lifestyle, your choices, and so on.

As some child-custody cases progress, judges are looking for other reasons to remove children from the home environment. If they find sufficient other reasons, judges will remove the children from what may be deemed an unsafe or unhealthy environment for the child, and in the final analysis, Paganism may have nothing to do with the decision. However, there are court cases where Paganism was, indeed, the deciding factor in removing the minor children from the home and placing them in the custody of a non-Pagan adult. I believe that such cases are in the

minority. As a general rule, the fewer reasons you give a judge to place your child somewhere else, the better off you are and the more assured you (and everyone else) can be that your Paganism was not the crux of the matter.

As a practical suggestion, if you are involved in such a case and if the media comes around to ask you questions, do not answer any questions unless you have previously consulted a lawyer. Your lawyer should be with you when you make statements. Most lawyers do not favor their clients speaking with the media at all. Before you make statements to the press, such as, “We are being persecuted for our religious beliefs,” consult your attorney. Chances are, your attorney will prefer you to keep a low media profile and not to interact with the media at all.

Some folks take their issues and their cases to the Web. This sword potentially cuts both ways. You might expose yourself and the weaknesses of your case; you might gain financial and emotional support; you might do yourself a favor; or you might shoot yourself in the foot. Before doing this, consult your attorney about the potential ramifications. Not all Pagans are going to side with Pagans in trouble. As a group, Pagans are pretty strong-willed and like to make up their own minds. The Pagan who puts his or her case on the Net might not like all the attention he or she gets.

Should I raise my children as Pagans?

The issue of children and exposure to Paganism—whether to rear a child within a certain Pagan tradition and then how much of that tradition do you permit the children to know or be aware of—is an often-asked question. The issue of what faith in which to rear a child is, according to the U.S. Supreme Court, uniquely within the

purview of the parents. Parental rights include the power to inculcate and indoctrinate their children in religious belief and practice as they see fit. (However, as with all rights, this is not absolute.)⁹ It is one of those core freedoms lying at the heart of our society.

Some Pagans complain that they were brainwashed by their parents and were raised in a religion that no one asked them about, thank you very much. These Pagans might take the position that to do likewise with their children is not appropriate. The children are allowed to choose whichever religion they want to be affiliated with. I have known Pagan parents who have Catholic children. The children chose to be Catholic, and the Pagan parents honored this choice. Those parents walked their talk and encouraged their children to pursue their own spirituality, even if Catholicism was where the kids finally found “home.”

Some Pagans want their children to be raised with the same love of the Goddess/God/The Great What Is that the parents have come to know. These Pagans rear their children to be Pagan. The children are raised in whatever tradition their parents practice. It is not Paganism, *per se*, that lies at the heart of success or failure at raising children as Pagans. It is the strength of character of the parents and their devotion/commitment to their children.

In these families, there are difficult moments and wonderful moments. I have known Pagan parents who have gone to parent-teacher conferences over issues involving the family’s religious/spiritual choice. Once a decision is made to rear a child as a Pagan, the parents should accept as a fact such a consequence. Without the strong support of family, a Pagan child is going to get lost in the

public school system. Children need the support of their parents, especially if they're faced with a difficult situation at school.

For example, children talk, as much as we may admonish them not to talk. A child may draw a beautiful, Fairy-like woman when drawing a "Witch." I know a child who did just that and, when she was told that Witches were ugly, she boldly stated, "No, my mommy is not!"

Pagan kids and schools

The fact that a child is Pagan and is being reared Pagan will probably come to light in the school system. This may result in a parent-teacher conference. Remember that teachers are usually in a class of persons required by statute to report instances of child abuse. Most of them are doing their jobs when they ask for such conferences. Some of them are not. You will know the difference pretty quickly.

If you're called upon to appear at such a conference, dress appropriately and be prepared for a rather rigorous conversation concerning your religious beliefs and your child. Also remember that you are not without ammunition in this situation. The position you assert in this situation will probably be something such as this: The religious indoctrination of children is uniquely the domain of the parent according to the U.S. Supreme Court, and this applies to everyone, even to you. This is the religious choice of the family, and you wish it to be respected, just as the choice of any Jewish or Christian family would be respected. Your children are clean, wear clean clothing, are current with their medical treatment, and are well nourished. The only nonconformity here is that your child is not a member of a mainstream religion.

Although you do not want to present yourself as defensive, litigious, or threatening, be firm and advise the teacher/school administrator that you will not tolerate jokes, teasing, or poor behavior exhibited by other students toward your child. Advise the school representative that you will put him or her on notice as soon as you receive the slightest inkling that your child is being harassed in any manner and that it should stop immediately. Harassment of children at school, where such harassment is known to school representatives (such as teachers, principals, and school guidance counselors), is actionable in a court of law. Let the school know that you will pursue all available legal remedies unless your child is afforded the same civil liberties as any Christian or Jewish child.

What about my kids and sex?

As Pagans, we would probably like to teach our children that the human body is a wonderful gift from the gods; that it is beautiful and nothing to be ashamed of. We would also like to teach our children that sexual pleasure is also a special gift to humanity from The Great What Is and that sex is part of the natural progress of many living things on the planet. This is commendable Pagan lore and teaching. The practical Pagan will probably teach this to his or her children, together with the scientific facts about reproduction, venereal disease, pregnancy, HIV infection, birth control, and the prevention of getting or spreading sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS.

The practical Pagan will stress personal responsibility and being responsible for the consequences of one's actions. After all, sex carries with it certain risks, as well as certain joys and beauties. Among those risks are the risk of creating new life and the risk of death through the contraction of

the HIV virus. Sex is, literally, the fulcrum point between life and death. The practical Pagan will tell the kids that unless they are fully prepared to take the consequences of creating new life or of potentially contracting and spreading a disease that kills, then they probably are not ready for sex and should leave well enough alone for the time being.

All of this can be done in the usual way: talking to your kids when you deem the time to be appropriate and utilizing appropriate learning and educational tools such as books, charts, the computer, videos, and so on. Generally speaking, this will not be considered circumspect behavior that invites scrutiny by the Division of Family Services. In fact, responsible sexual education taught in the home is the ideal. It helps if the schools help, but people still have problems with that, so don't depend on the schools to help you out here. Do a thorough job at home. This probably will not meet with any undue scrutiny from the state.

What will invite a "look see" from the state is the attendance of minor children at rituals where those attending are nude or semi-nude or rituals with sexual overtones and/or overt sexual behavior. The practical Pagan understands that if children are involved in such goings-on, then there are huge risks involved. This is adult material. Leave it for the adults. Simply stated: This is not appropriate for children younger than 18.

Most states have statutes proscribing the exposure of children to lewdness or contributing to the delinquency of a minor. What is and is not illegal or criminal behavior where minors are concerned is pretty much spelled out in your state's statutes. How specific does this all get? The Missouri statute, for example, states that "the term 'sexual act' means any of the following, whether performed or

engaged in either with any other person or alone: sexual or anal intercourse, masturbation, bestiality, sadism, masochism, fetishism, fellatio, cunnilingus, any other sexual activity or nudity, if such nudity is to be depicted for the purpose of sexual stimulation or gratification of any individual who may view such depiction.”¹⁰

Thus, under the statute, it could be considered unlawful to have sex in the living room every day at 3:15 p.m. during the week, even with your spouse, if you know that at 3:15 p.m. during the week, your child is going to come into the family room after coming home from school.

Simply put, if, as a Pagan parent, you insist on involving your children in skyclad ceremonies, be assured that one day, you will be answering some serious questions before a school administrator, a judge, a lawyer, a jury, the press, or some other member of your family. The surest way to avoid such a scene is to not involve your children in skyclad rituals or sexually oriented ceremonies, no matter how benign or beautiful they might seem to you. You are an adult. You are of the legal age of consent. Your children are not. If you insist on pursuing this course of action, be prepared for the consequences. Get a good lawyer and be prepared for a fight.

What does this mean about festivals and Pagan gatherings where there might be nudity? First, you should inquire about such things. Ask the sponsors if there is a dress code or if going nude is an option. Some festivals and gatherings do not permit their attendants to go nude except at certain rituals (which are for adults only) or except in certain areas of the festival grounds for exactly this reason. If you are going to attend rituals, ask if nudity is an option and ask to know the content of ritual ahead of time. Persons under the age of 18 may be prohibited from

attending. You may wish to prohibit your children from attending and place them elsewhere, with proper supervision, if you wish to attend a ritual which you believe may have content not suitable for your minor children. This is your option.

The practical Pagan uses common sense and good judgment, especially where children are concerned.

BEING A RESPONSIBLE ADULT IS A TOUGH JOB: ETHICAL CONDUCT

Some people believe that Pagans are completely without ethics. Nothing could be further from the truth. Unfortunately, as I pointed out elsewhere, there is no one single place in which a Pagan code of ethics has been compiled. We cannot point to one, all-encompassing text and say, "This is our code of behavior." Often times, we must explain to people what our ethical code is. Some Pagans don't articulate their ethical code very well. Such an inability is unfortunate; it can lead some folks into thinking that Pagans don't have an ethical code or standards by which they live. The practical Pagan has thought about his or her standards, his or her dos and don'ts for living, and the rules by which he or she lives life. Hopefully, the practical Pagan can articulate these when pressed to do so.

Examples of what Pagans believe can be found in books. For example, Robin Wood has written an excellent book on the topic: *When, Why...If* (Livingtree Press, 1996). If you are on an e-mail list, you might begin such a discussion and listen to what comes about. Discussion with other Pagans has proven a rich learning ground for such matters. Web sites are full of articles regarding Pagan ethics. One Web site particularly rich in such material is

The Witches' Voice (*witchvox.com*). Recently, a speaker for a Pagan event came to my area, and he carried with him a handout on the ethical guidelines by which he tries to live his life. It was a wonderful piece of literature, which I hold near and dear to my heart.

So, on the whole, what can be said about Pagan ethics?

PAGANS DON'T LIKE TO HURT OTHER PEOPLE

Generally speaking, Pagans don't like to hurt other people. They share this with many of the other great religions of the world. The act of deliberately hurting other people, whether physically, sexually, emotionally, financially, or magickally, is frowned upon. Most responsible Pagans and most responsible users of magick will think long and hard about wishing any sort of harm upon even the most vile of individuals.

Why is this? Although there is no one correct answer, there are generally two schools of thought on this issue. The first is that some Pagans are true pacifists. These folks believe that the world has not changed for the better in several thousand years of practicing an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. They truly believe that enough love and enough hugging will fix everything. You will find such idealists in all religions.

The second school of thought is that some Pagans believe that what goes around comes around—that is, if you visit it upon someone, it will one day be visited upon you. It's best to avoid that scene altogether by not going there. Some Pagans believe that time should not be wasted in working negative magick or generating negative vibes, because there has been enough of that already and look where it has gotten us. Some Pagans believe that Karma works,

so why bother trying to fix what the universe is going to eventually fix anyway? Some Pagans believe in the Rule of Three—that is, if you put it out there in the universe, eventually it is going to come home to you, and it will be three times as strong as when you put it out there in the first place. Figured in these terms, it is hard to imagine that *anyone* is worth a hexing or cursing, especially if that energy is going to multiply and eventually find its way home to you.

There are people who think that all Pagans are walking reruns of the “peace, love, togetherness” movement of the 1960s. Nothing could be further from the truth. Some Pagans will aggressively seek retribution for perceived wrongs and injustices. Some Pagans actively hex and curse, accepting all the potential consequences. They argue that this is supremely adult behavior and ask why should they not do it?

So, in Paganism, as in most other religious movements or lifestyles, there is a broad range of behavior that is and is not considered “ethical.”

PAGANS BELIEVE IN SELF-RESPONSIBILITY

In the most general of terms, the majority of Pagans believe in self-responsibility. They hold themselves accountable for their actions, and they take responsibility for them. The concept of a being who is the Lord of Supreme Evil who makes people do evil is antithetical to most Pagans. For most Pagans, there simply is no grandiose Lord of Darkness who goes around enticing people to evil deeds and ways so that the souls of these gullible beings can be gobbled up and cast into lakes of eternal damnation and fire. Thus, the rationale of “the Devil made me

do it” usually has no application or following in most Pagan belief systems. The Devil as usually portrayed simply does not exist, and because he/she/it does not exist, how can the Devil make you do anything? Pagans accept responsibility for their acts, their thoughts, and their words. As such, they understand that every act, every thought, and every word will have some sort of consequence.

PAGANS UNDERSTAND THAT ALL ACTS HAVE CONSEQUENCES

Most Pagans recognize the theorem that for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. They understand that their actions have consequences. They live mindful of this. Thus, the practical Pagan thinks before acting and looks before leaping. Although some might argue that this would take the spontaneous joy out of leaping, it is usually better to know what one will land upon before swan diving off the precipice and into the chasm.

PAGANS BELIEVE IN AND PRACTICE TOLERANCE

Pagans tend to be very tolerant people. At one point in their lives, most Pagans have felt like outsiders or outcasts. Many Pagans have experienced rejection at the hands of their families, their lovers and spouses, their own children, their friends, and so forth. This sort of rejection eventually tends to engender flexibility and tolerance in the Pagan folk. Not wishing to visit upon others the sort of bad behavior that has been visited upon them, most Pagans give a wide berth to other ideas and belief systems.

Pagans do have their opinions, however. They are entitled to have them. They are entitled to disagree. However, some Pagans do like to unduly criticize, put down, satirize, or make fun of other religions, traditions, paths, and/or faiths. In Pagan parlance, this is known as “bashing.” Of course, this behavior is not peculiar to Pagans. Many non-Pagans do it, too. Many Pagans believe that they have been the victims of bashing, and they have no desire to do it to someone else.

Disagreement is not a *carte blanche* to behave rudely, stupidly, or without respect. For most Pagans, there is a point in their development where they rant quite a bit about everyone else in the Universe. In *Conversations With Pagans*, I was often confronted with newbie Pagans who complained loudly and bitterly about where they had been or what religious path they were fleeing. I did not try to shut them down. I let them vent; it was part of their healing process. The whole wound had to be lanced, drained, and allowed to heal. The open expression of this pain and unhappiness was often the first step of such a spiritual healing.

The practical Pagan understands that there are persons seeking refuge in Paganism from other belief systems that might not be particularly tolerant or flexible. These refugees often come to Paganism with a good deal of emotional baggage. One of the methods for coping with this emotional baggage is venting, ranting, or some other form of non-apologetic complaining/criticizing. These tirades are often directed toward the intolerant or inflexible religion from which the refugee came.

Some time later, the practical Pagan will again encounter these same refugees and find them remarkably changed. I often found this to be the case. The wounded newbie

Pagans would thank me for allowing them a safe forum for the full expression of their views. Often, those views had changed, and these same people had come to be more tolerant of the faiths they had left before they came to Paganism.

It is true that, every now and then, you will meet a Pagan or two who has no use at all for so-and-so of such-and-such tradition/path/religion. They have no use at all for anyone other than those who share their exact same views. In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, I think we have all seen the potential danger in such a viewpoint. How do you deal with these people? You always have the option of removing yourself from the purview of such a person; you do not have to stick around and listen to this stuff if it turns your stomach. If you think you can successfully reeducate such a person or if you think you can help him or her understand the error of his or her thinking and ways, then reach out to him or her, but know that the road might be long and unforgiving.

PAGANS HAVE GREAT RESPECT FOR NATURE

Many Pagans express a spiritual reverence for Nature. The expected end result here is that most Pagans are very ecology-conscious. Pagans view themselves as stewards of the land.

It is our job to keep the Earth in balance and to protect its resources for future generations. This means future generations of human beings, plants, animals, and so forth. Pagans do not subscribe to the notion that they may indiscriminately use up the Earth's resources without any thought for tomorrow or the next century. To Pagans, Mother Earth is sacred, and they treat Her as such.

The Practical Pagan

Thus, practical Pagans do not litter, and do pick up other people's litter. Practical Pagans do not waste resources, but turn off electrical switches and appliances that they are not using. They recycle. They favor land sanctuaries and preservation of habitat. They usually support the continued lives of endangered species and ecosystems. They usually support legislation that is environment-friendly and sometimes work to have such legislation passed. They are conscious of how much water they use, would like to consume only products that are not doused with chemicals and herbicides, and are often vegetarian.



However, there are Pagans who hunt and fish, who eat meat, and who do not apologize for carrying leather handbags or wearing leather shoes. As with any group of people, it is often hard to describe them all in glittering generalities, and exceptions to almost every “general rule” can be found. Be mindful of the “general rules” and keep your mind open to the exceptions. Most Pagans do enjoy the challenge of thinking for themselves.

As you can see, Paganism is not an excuse to act like a juvenile delinquent. Together with its freedoms, Paganism also imposes immense responsibilities on those encompassed in its many folds, but this is typical of life in general, so it should be nothing new. The practical Pagan does not use Paganism as a reason or an excuse to indulge in bad manners, unscrupulous behavior, or deliberately hurtful acts. Hopefully, you now have a better idea of what to expect when you encounter other Pagans. You have a better idea of how your life might change (or not change) since you have decided that you are Pagan. See? This is really not frightening at all.



CHAPTER 4

Yeah, but What About My Sex Life?

Not surprisingly, the topic of sex is a little more complicated in the Pagan venue than what some Pagans may have been used to in their prior non-Pagan lives. In the Pagan world, the choice of the individual is not hampered or circumscribed by a previously ordained set of rules, regulations, and commandments. Although the practical Pagan recognizes that one must live within the confines of secular law, even secular law has begun to change with respect to sex. Same-gendered civil unions have been receiving favorable judicial review in some states. For example, the Vermont Supreme Court has held that homosexual couples are entitled to the same benefits and protections as wedded couples of the opposite sex.¹¹ This has brought about legislation in the Vermont House of Representatives granting those benefits and rights usually reserved for heterosexual couples to homosexual couples.

Old laws proscribing such acts as oral sex and sodomy are rarely enforced. However, certain legal truths still exist: Polygamy and pedophilia are illegal. Although I do not

know any Pagans who practice or condone pedophilia, there are Pagans who claim to have more than one spouse and who live in polyamorous relationships.

Paganism does not prevent polygamy or polyamory. This is a radically different viewpoint from the monogamy lauded by present-day Judaism and Christianity and upon which the present-day institution of marriage is based. Watching certain popular talk shows, it is plain that the cultural “ideal” is still considered to be heterosexual monogamy, whether in a premarital relationship or the marital relationship. In Paganism, there is no cultural “ideal.” There is the choice that the individual makes.

To be quite candid, most people are used to being told what they can and cannot do regarding sex. In modern Paganism, this is not the case. For most people, this presents a startling array of choices not unlike a desert buffet. Without common sense and a little practicality, it might be easy to get a little overwhelmed. Some folks believe that they *have* to lead wild sexual lives in order to be Pagan. Nothing could be further from the truth.

WHY ARE SEX AND NUDITY SUCH A BIG PAGAN DEAL?

I am often asked why sex and nudity are such recurring themes in Pagan conversation and in Pagan thought. Paganism is not the only religion or spiritual tradition that has devoted volumes and tomes to these subjects. Most religions do. After all, people populate religions, and people are fascinated by these topics. If sex and nudity were not so fascinating, there would not be such commodities as X-rated movies, sex talk phone lines, and so-called pornographic magazines. Sex and nudity are big business;

there is a big demand for them. We, as human beings, are endlessly fascinated by them. Pagans are no different.

However, if the practical Pagan looks closer, he or she will see that the answer is rather like an artichoke or an onion, with many layers of thought and theory. If the prevailing attitude about sex is not “don’t do this,” in the Pagan world, then what is the prevailing attitude and where did it come from?

THE ORIGINS OF FREEDOM OF SEXUAL CHOICE IN THE PAGAN WORLD COME FROM MANY SOURCES

Pagans revere Nature, and the body in its natural state is naked and without material adornment. This is how we came into the world, after all. Some magick users believe that clothing impedes the flow of energy necessary to effectively perform magick. According to this particular magickal discipline, the most appropriate dress for magick is no dress at all: It should be done in the nude.

For those Pagans who recognize Deity, most of them admit that Deity has a feminine aspect, in addition to a masculine aspect. For many Pagans, there is a Goddess at work in the Universe as well as a God. These Pagans have pretty much taken to heart the Charge of the Goddess as established in traditional Wiccan lore. According to the book *Eight Sabbats for Witches*, the Goddess advises Her children: “And ye shall be free from slavery; and as a sign that ye be really free, ye shall be naked in your rites; and ye shall dance, sing, feast, make music and love, all in my praise. For mine is the ecstasy of the spirit, and mine also is joy on Earth; for my law is love unto all beings.” The Charge of the Goddess is the origin of another maxim that

is much loved and widely accepted in the Pagan community: “All acts of love and pleasure are My rituals....”¹² Thus, Pagans view love, sex, sensuality, and the physically pleasurable aspects of their humanity as sacred and holy. These attributes are to be savored by everyone of legal age, no matter their gender, age, race, or sexual orientation. They are the gifts of the Goddess, in particular, to Her people.

Having been told this by the Goddess, some Pagans believe that the body and all the wonders of the flesh are gifts to humanity from a Divine being. Thus, the body and all its wonders are to be enjoyed and indulged. One Pagan elder I know, Kiwi Carlisle, made a profound statement in ritual at Magickal Weekend in 1997: “Have sex as often as you can. When you are old, it is one thing you will not regret doing.”¹³ (Magickal Weekend is a three-day Pagan event sponsored by the Council for Alternative Spiritual Traditions [CAST] in St. Louis. For more information, go to www.cast-stl.org/magickalweekend.htm.) Other Pagans view the freedom to enjoy the body and all its functions as the direct antithesis of the prevailing culture. Because they love going against the mainstream, these Pagans revel in fleshly delights. It is delicious to be different, and in Paganism, one can be very different.

So, the Pagan attitudes about the body, nudity, and sex can be viewed as a form of liturgy, Divine inspiration, practicality, magickal methodology, or simple rebellion.

PAGANS JUST HAVE A DIFFERENT ATTITUDE ABOUT SEX

Most Pagans have a very different attitude about their bodies, sex, and nudity. Pagans view their bodies without

fear, shame, or guilt. They celebrate the body in all its glory and for all its functions, including sex. They are not ashamed or afraid of their bodies, of nudity, or of sex. They do not feel guilty about their bodies, nudity, or sex.

As with all things, there are exceptions. For example, some Pagans are still victims of the body-conscious culture. Many of the ancient images of the Goddess bear absolutely no resemblance to any living supermodel. In fact, many ancient Goddess images, such as the Venus of Laussel and the Venus of Willendorf, are images of very large women.

However, despite such archetypal Pagan images and icons, the prevailing non-Pagan culture enshrines, worships, enthrones, and deifies a body image that most women will never have unless they starve themselves to death, spend lots of money on surgery, or live in a gym and ignore the other responsibilities of everyday life. Most women will never look like a supermodel, Barbie, Marilyn Monroe, or Flo Jo. Many women are still emotionally crippled by this, and many men still cannot see farther than this. Times are changing, though. Thank the Gods!

Women are not the only ones who suffer from such cultural stereotypes and the drive to conform to them. Men are affected by the notion that they should look like movie stars, models, and athletic superheroes. There are men emotionally crippled by this notion, and there are women who cannot look beyond it. More's the pity. However, the pressure on men to achieve this sort of "perfection" does not seem to be as intense as the pressure on women.

Due to these pressures, there are still plenty of Pagan women and Pagan men who will not go naked at a

skyclad-optional event, who will not perform ritual or ceremony in the nude if they have the chance, who are still quite self-conscious about taking their clothes off, and who can only make love comfortably in the dark.

Finally, there are some Pagans who argue that folks coming to Paganism from other religions carry with them excess emotional baggage from those religions. This may be true, but what is also true is that the individual must not be forced to conform or do anything that, in their heart of hearts, is against their will or their nature. If a Pagan is most comfortable being heterosexually monogamous or clothed in ritual gear from chin to ankles, then so be it. That choice is not to be demeaned or ridiculed; it is to be respected.

WHY IS THIS SO DIFFERENT FROM MOST EVERYONE ELSE?

As most of us have noticed, the traditional Jewish, Christian, and Muslim attitudes about sex, nudity, the body, and women are not liberal in the least. The source for these mainstream attitudes is pretty much the Old Testament. Judaism and Christianity share the Old Testament. Judaism and Islam share Abraham. This brings us to the concept of original sin.

Many of us would still like to know what that really is, but here is the traditional and accepted lore. Humans are born tainted with original sin because human beings are born out of women's bodies. According to the Old Testament (Genesis 3:16–17), women birth their children in blood and pain because this was the punishment that God laid on Eve after the debacle in the Garden of Eden. There, Eve disobeyed God, and, at the urging of the Serpent

(symbolizing the Devil), she ate the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, which was an apple—a fruit sacred to the Goddess! Eve then convinced Adam to eat this fruit. Presumably, Adam would never have done this had Eve not seduced and beguiled him into it. Having eaten, the pair became aware of their nakedness and became ashamed. (Why they should have been ashamed still amazes me, though. Having been made in the likeness of God, they should have been damnably proud to look like Him!) Being ashamed, they hid from their Creator when He called to them. God punished Adam and Eve for disobeying Him.

The act of disobeying God's commandment in the Garden of Eden is the original sin. God expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden and for her special role in this set of circumstances, Eve and all her children (the human race) were punished. Eve's punishment was that when she reproduced, her children would be born in pain and blood. All Eve's children would be tainted with her sin of disobedience.

The mechanism for passing that original sin on to other humans was the act of being born from a woman's body. The act of creating other human beings is sexual intercourse. Thus, for hundreds of years, women, sex, and nudity have been reviled by much of traditional Western religious doctrine.

From the concept of original sin springs many of the prevailing notions that sex is bad and that sex is something you do only to have children. Frankly, there are many other strange notions about sex floating around in the mainstream religions. Here are a few of them: Sex is something only men may enjoy; sex is something women should not enjoy and, if they do, they are whores and not of marriageable quality. Sex is something that should be reserved for

heterosexuals only. Sex is something that should be reserved for marriage only. Only intercourse is permissible. Only intercourse in certain positions is permissible. If it feels good, it must obviously be bad and therefore you should not be doing it, be it oral sex, masturbation, or having sex with the woman on top. Menstruation makes women unclean. No wonder Freud had, and continues to have, such a following!

As a corollary to these odd notions, there are some rather peculiar notions regarding women floating around in the mainstream religions as well. What notions are these? You have probably either heard or been exposed to them before. They sound something like this: Women are less than men; women are valuable only for their ability to please men; women only have value because they bear and birth children; the only functions women have are to keep their husbands' homes in order, together with conceiving, bearing, and raising children; women are the playthings of men; a man may have many wives, playthings, mistresses, or concubines as they choose, but women are restricted to one spouse, that being a male husband; women are not divine; it is okay to have sex with a woman against her will if you are married to her; it is okay to abuse women; women are incapable of rational thought; women should not be paid a man's wage when they do a man's job; and so forth. I am sure you get the idea.

Paganism flatly rejects all of these somewhat antiquated notions. Most Pagans believe that women are just as important as men and that no one gender has more importance or prominence than the other. (However, there are Pagan traditions where the feminine role is predominant, sometimes to the exclusion of male deity, which has generated cries of discrimination and of discriminatory treatment

by Pagan men.) Women have value beyond sex, childbearing, and child-rearing. Women are not “things.” No human being is a “thing.” No one is a “plaything.” People are entitled to sexual gratification by the sheer fact of being human beings. If a woman and all others involved agree, a woman may have more than one lover, spouse, playmate, friend, or significant other. It is never okay to have sex with anyone against his or her will. It is never okay to abuse anyone. Of course women are capable of rational thought! In short, women are divine and carry within them the divine spark of life just as all living beings do.

In short, the Goddess is very real. You should treat Her earthly incarnations (women) with all the respect and love that you afford the Goddess. If you don't, you are nothing more than a hypocrite.

The same arguments hold true for men, as well. They are the earthly incarnation of the God, and they should be afforded all the respect and love which you would give Him.

Well, all this is great, you are probably thinking to yourself, but exactly what do I get to do?

SEX IS A MATTER OF CHOICE, AS LONG AS NO ONE GETS HURT

Pagans also tend to view sex in terms of choice and not in terms of “right” or “wrong.” To have sex or to not have sex? This is a matter of choice. With whom to have sex? This is a matter of choice. As long as there is no deception involved, with whom someone has sex is their business. If the sex acts involved will not have deleterious consequences on others, then sex is something to be had, to be enjoyed, and to be savored if everyone involved is a consenting adult and if everyone consents.

Pagans recognize that human beings often do not have the luxury of deciding on a rational basis whom we fall in love with and to whom we are sexually drawn. Thus, Pagans are not hung up on nor do they put down homosexuals, bisexuals, lesbians, transsexuals, transvestites, or drag queens. One's natural urges and instincts are just that: natural urges and instincts. A man attracted to other men, a woman attracted to other women, or a person attracted to both men and women should not be denied the fulfillment of his or her spirits and emotions. A man capable of looking good in both men and women's clothing should also not be denied the opportunity to look good. Certainly, there are plenty of Pagans who are not denied the opportunity to look bad and to commit heinous crimes of fashion.

Some Pagans have open relationships. What does this mean? This means that some Pagans, although generally committed to a single partner, also have sex and/or highly charged emotional relationships outside the boundaries of that committed relationship. This does not mean that you must have an open relationship to be Pagan or that you have to run out and participate in one to be Pagan. It just means that some Pagans have them. That's all.

UM, WHAT ABOUT THIS OPEN RELATIONSHIP BUSINESS?

Pagans in open relationships should consider very carefully the effect that their open relationship will have on all the persons involved before embarking on an open relationship.

Persons who should be considered are the people in the primary relationship, the person or persons who are going to be a part of the open relationship, and any other

spouses, significant others, lovers, roommates and children. Children can be significantly affected by the sexual choices their parents make. The consideration afforded to persons who might be affected by what goes on in the bedroom of all the lovers involved is just one example of living by The Rede: “An’ it harm none, do as you will.”



In an open relationship of any sort, communication is critical. There must be communication among all the persons participating in the open relationship. There must be honesty among all these people as well. Generally speaking, the primary relationship should be a healthy relationship to begin with. Sleeping with other people is usually not a prescription for curing a sick relationship or a relationship that is not well. Hidden agendas are not well served in open relationships—that is, if someone has the notion that he or she can break up a primary relationship such as a marriage or a long-standing significant-other relationship, then a person harboring such a notion probably has no business entering into an open relationship.

Open relationships generally have rules of conduct and behavior. The people involved will usually establish these rules. There are no rules of conduct that pertain to all open relationships, except those of honesty and of good communication.

Such relationships are not for immature people, people who are emotionally unstable, or people who have enormous issues with jealousy, possessiveness, envy, and territory. Pagans who enjoy non-monogamous relationships are engaging in very adult, very mature forms of behavior. Usually, there is a lot of communication, love, and nurturing going on. At least, there should be. Non-monogamous relationships are not for immature individuals who already have a difficult time coping with their relationships, whether one is Pagan or not. Most Pagans recognize this and conduct themselves accordingly.



IS IT OKAY TO BE HAPPILY MARRIED AND HAVE A FEW KIDS?

Yes. It is absolutely fine to be Pagan, to be happily married to one spouse, and to raise a large family. For those

Pagans who believe in Deity, most of them do not believe that the gods and goddesses in their pantheons demand heterosexual marriages with children being the only valid reason for having sex. There are plenty of Pagans who are very happy in their monogamous heterosexual marriages with their children. These are choices to be respected, and these choices are just as valid as the Pagan man who is out there copying Pan, a Greco-Roman god of Nature usually depicted as a Satyr, with a particularly robust sexual appetite for Nymphs. I have also met celibate Pagans and Pagans who were involved in committed relationships/marriages that involved more than three people!

WHAT ABOUT PAGAN ETHICS AND SEX?

Paganism is not about self abnegation, but neither is it about irresponsible hedonism. In Paganism, we are free to love as we choose, as long as we do not deceive ourselves, deceive others, or hurt other human beings. For example, it would probably not be a good idea for a lesbian who knows she is a lesbian to marry a man who believes her to be a heterosexual woman who will be faithful to him. This is deceitful. The woman is lying to herself and to her prospective spouse. This marriage will probably end in disaster. From a Pagan point of view, this is not an ethical course of action.

Another unethical course of action is the relationship wherein one individual expects and demands fidelity but the other is not faithful, has other lovers, and lies about it. Again, such a relationship will probably end in disaster. The person who sleeps around on his or her partner, while the partner believes that the relationship is monogamous, is a reprehensible human being who is piling up bad karma

points. Suppose the unfaithful partner has other lovers and does not lie about it. This can be very hurtful to the partner who is faithful and who expects fidelity from the other partner. If the relationship is obviously not giving you what you want and what you need, then the obvious answer is to get out of it. It may hurt now but, believe me, it will hurt a whole lot less in the long run. The partner who needs and wants fidelity needs to find a partner with similar needs and who will be faithful. The unfaithful partner will probably be better off in an open relationship of some sort. Paganism does not demand that relationships remain intact while the people in them are inflicting pain on one another.

The Pagan sexual ethos is about enjoyment, responsibility, emotional and physical well-being, and honesty to oneself and to one's partners. Within this parameter, the modern Pagan is free to navigate the vast ocean of human sexuality according to his or her own choosing without guilt, fear, or shame being superimposed from on high. Pagans have learned or rediscovered the ancient truth that sex is not only one of the great perks associated with being human, but that it can also be a path to spiritual enlightenment.

PAGANISM, SEX, AND MINORS

Pagans do not encourage, condone, or have sex with minors. In most states, if you have sex with someone who is under the age of sexual consent, you will be committing a statutory offense that usually carries some kind of prison term as a possible punishment. The age of sexual consent varies from state to state. In order to protect yourself and to protect any child that you love, you should know the

laws of your state regarding the legal age of consent for sex. (You can find your state statutes in the law library of the county courthouse of your county seat. Online, go to www.law.cornell.edu/topics/state_statutes.html and look under the heading “Criminal Code.”) Let me be really, really clear about this: It is never appropriate to have sex with someone who is not of the legal age to consent.

Furthermore, just because it is “legal” does not necessarily mean that it is appropriate to have sex with someone that a statute defines as legal. Young people are quite impressionable in their early and middle adolescent years. Even if they are 18 years old, it is still possible to influence them unduly.

For example, a sexually mature High Priestess who has lots of chutzpah and plenty of magickal clout will be quite alluring and appealing to an 18-year-old young man who seeks entry into her coven. It would be inappropriate for said High Priestess to use her position and power as an excuse to get said 18-year-old young man into her bed. It would probably be more appropriate to let the young man garner experience elsewhere, become a little older, and then wait for him to approach the High Priestess when he is more mature and not quite so bedazzled by the sexual glamour in which the High Priestess is probably veiled.

The same is, of course, true for the sexually adept and magickally powerful High Priest. You should seriously question any tradition that requires you to have sex with so-and-so, whoever that is, in order to be initiated or in order to advance up the magickal ladder. This is not a place that you want to go leaping into without looking.

I recognize that in the mainstream culture, it is perfectly permissible for older men to have younger women as their lovers, mistresses, and wives. In the mainstream

culture, it is not permissible for older women to have younger men as their lovers and husbands unless you are a movie star or supermodel, and, even then, some of these women get a lot of heck dished out to them by the press.

How do Pagans feel about the May-December romance issue? Again, most Pagans will tell you that this is a matter of choice. It is also the business of the people involved, as long as they are adults (that is, of the legal age of consent) and as long as no one is being taken advantage of. If the people involved are happy and if they are not hurting anyone, then Goddess bless! Every set of circumstances is unique and should be evaluated on its own merits.

Let us take another look at the sexually mature High Priestess and the much younger male member of her coven. The High Priestess has considerable influence: After all, she is a High Priestess and occupies a special position within the coven. It would be inappropriate for her to use her position and influence strictly to gratify her physical senses. It would be inappropriate for her to think only of her own pleasure. This is selfish and does not take into account the young man's emotional growth, maturity, and needs. Even if the law will not prosecute you, this is no excuse to behave irresponsibly; that is, to behave without thinking of the effects that your actions will have on others in both the long and short term.

SEX HAS ITS PLACE IN MAGICK AND IN RITUAL

So, what place does sex have in magick, in ritual, as a price for learning, and as the price for membership into a coven, spiritual observance group, or other group? There are certain magickal traditions that use sexual energy as the battery to fuel their magick. This is serious business.

The power of the human orgasm is quite awesome, and it has been avidly sought after by human beings, whether Pagan or not, since the dawn of time. Fueled into magick, this energy is just as awesome, but it is not for the unskilled, the undisciplined, or those who are merely curious. It is not for those who are just looking for a good time, and it should not be shoved aside as being insincere or an excuse for a cheap thrill. The person who seeks this path will undergo a rigorous training and will probably find a deeply fulfilling and spiritually rewarding experience. For some insight into sexual magick, I recommend the following books: *Modern Sex Magick: Secrets of Erotic Spirituality* by Donald Michael Kraig (Llewellyn publications, 1998) and *The Art of Sexual Magic* by Margo Anand (G.P. Putnam's sons, 1995).

Sex in ritual is also a valid practice and one that is taken quite seriously by those who incorporate it into their ritual practice. For example, in the Alexandrian Wiccan tradition, the great rite actually refers to the sexual union of the Goddess and of the God. It can be performed literally by the High Priest and High Priestess of the ritual, or it can be performed symbolically by the immersion of the ritual athame into the chalice. There is no doubt about the sexual meaning in the act of plunging the dagger into the goblet: It symbolizes the sexual union of the divine feminine and the divine masculine. Similarly, there are certain Sabbats with a highly sexual nature and content. For example, one of the themes of Beltane is the sexual union of the Goddess and of the God, who join together to fertilize the land and its creatures so that there may be abundance and prosperity. This is the meaning of the May Pole, which is a phallic symbol, plunged proudly into Mother Earth at the height of Spring.

Sex as a price for learning is not well regarded in the Pagan community. I have not met a single teacher or elder who demanded or required that a student have sex with him or her in order to learn what the teacher or elder had to teach. If those people exist and if you should meet them, then use your common sense. If your common sense tells you that this is a sham, that this is dangerous, or that this is something that you do not want to participate in, then listen to your instincts and decline to be this person's student. Do not be dazzled by his or her status or anything else. You are not required to have sex with anyone in order to learn anything. As with anything involving sex, you may do so if you choose to.

Sex as a price for membership into spiritual observance groups is also not generally well regarded in the Pagan community. There are certain Pagan traditions that may involve sex as part of initiation into a higher level of magickal working within the group. However, to demand sex with so-and-so just as the cost of admission into the group is something that the potential joiner should scrutinize carefully. If you are seeking entry into any spiritual observance group, and if you have reason to believe that sex may be involved, then ask point blank: *"Do I have to have sex with so-and-so or with anybody just to be a part of this thing?"*

If you are told "yes," if you are of the age of legal consent in your state, if you continue on with this group of people, and if you undergo the sexual initiation, well, you are responsible for yourself, and you really have no room to whine or complain about it later. You asked; you were told; and you went ahead and did it anyway. You could have stopped at any point and backed off.

However, if you ask this group of people which you would like to join if sex is the cost of admission and if they

lie to you, then get the heck out of Dodge as soon as possible. Such deceit should not be tolerated. Do not tolerate it. Do not associate yourself with these people. You do not have to associate yourself with these people. Just get out of there.

If you are 18 or older and if you are specifically looking for a tradition with a significant sexual component to it, you can probably find it. The practical Pagan understands that as with all things sexual, such a path demands responsible choices. Make sure that you ask plenty of questions about the people involved, their sexual histories, their health histories, and the mysteries in which you are about to participate. Extend the same honesty and responsibility to your future partners that you expect them to extend to you. Practice safe sex. Make sure that everyone else is practicing safe sex. There should be no deceit or fraudulent behavior involved that could potentially hurt or deceive a spouse or significant other. For example, if you know that a member of your group has a spouse at home who is clueless about the activities of your fellow group member, it might be considered irresponsible of you to have sex with that group member. You would have complicity in the deceiving of that spouse. It is perfectly acceptable to decline to have sex with that fellow group member on that basis.

SEX, LIES, SELF-DECEPTION, AND DISEASE

There are some great lies that are, unfortunately, spoken in the Pagan community. One of those great lies is this: “I am in an open relationship.” Unless you confirm this in person with the spouse/significant other of the person making this statement, don’t believe it. If having sex with this person is so important to you, it is at least as

important as maintaining your integrity. You can do this by affirming or disaffirming the statement directly with the spouse/ significant other of the person with whom you want to have sex. I have done this. Usually, I am pleasantly surprised by the smile that greets me: “Why, yes! We have an open relationship. You may believe my spouse/ significant other in this regard, and you have my permission to have sex with him/her.” It is always better to be safe than sorry.

One of the great self-deceptions is that magick will prevent you from getting sexually transmitted diseases, and thus you do not need to use condoms or practice other forms of safe sex. Do not believe that your great magickal power, your ability to read someone’s personal aura or energy, or that the love of your chosen Deity will protect you from AIDS, venereal disease, sexually transmitted vaginal infections, or sexually transmitted urinary tract infections. There is only one way to absolutely prevent a sexually transmitted disease: Do not have sex. Period. However, you can significantly decrease your risk for contracting AIDS or any other sexually transmitted diseases by practicing safe sex: use condoms, dental dams, and other latex barriers where appropriate. Educate yourself. Talk to your doctor. Read some good books. Ask your doctor for a few. Collect medical literature at free clinics on preventing STDs, pregnancy, and the spread of HIV. Keep your choice of partners to a minimum. Get tested regularly and demand the same of your partners. Talk is cheap. A copy of a recent test result with your prospective lover’s name on it that your prospective lover shares with you speaks volumes.

Again, this book does not purport to be a self-help manual of infinite knowledge on sexually transmitted diseases and

how not to get them. It is beneficial to have a doctor and to talk about these things with her or him. Make and keep regular appointments with your doctor, and keep her or him advised of your sexual activity. Consult a physician at the first sign of discharge from the vagina or penis, whenever you are experiencing pain or irregularity in urinating, or whenever your urine is foul-smelling, cloudy, or discolored. Ladies, if your periods become irregular, if you begin spotting, if you experience excessive pain when menstruating, or if you have any other trouble with your monthly cycles, consult your OB/GYN. Go for regular pelvic exams, breast exams, and Pap smears.

Please value yourself at least as much as you value having sex with someone else. Pagans value crones and elder wizards. There should be a lot of us in the coming years. We should not depopulate ourselves out of sexual irresponsibility and stupidity.

SEX AND THE HORMONE-LADEN TEENAGER

I am often asked about young Pagans who are not of the age of sexual consent. What do we say to them? My advice in this department is that same as that which I give to any teenager who seeks my advice or my tutelage, be they Pagan or not.

Here is the advice. A young person must understand that sex involves life and death issues. By having sex, you can contract deadly diseases. AIDS will kill you; modern medicine has the power to slow the disease down, but no cure or vaccine has been found. Syphilis, if left untreated, has the power to kill you and drive you insane. By having sex, you can contract diseases that cannot be cured and that will make your life very complicated. Genital herpes,

like AIDS, has no cure, and frequent outbreaks can be painful both physically and emotionally. By having sex, you can contract various diseases and medical conditions that, although curable by medical treatment, can be painful and expensive to treat. Venereal warts, scientifically known as condyloma acuminata, gonorrhea, certain vaginal infections, and certain urinary tract infections are all transmitted by sexual contact. Mouth-to-genital contact and genital-to-genital contact spread the organisms that cause these diseases. You can contract all these things from other people; you, in turn, can give them to other people.

In essence, sex involves life and death decisions. It involves the possibility of conceiving another human being—that is, of creating another human life. With pregnancy comes the concurrent responsibility of deciding whether to carry the fetus full term or whether to abort the fetus. Once birth has occurred, there is the decision of whether to keep and to raise the infant or to place the infant elsewhere for rearing. Face this immutable fact: By having sex, women can become pregnant. Face this other immutable fact: Women do not get pregnant without implantation of male sperm. Thus, the creation and rearing of a new life is the responsibility of both the male and female progenitors.

Teenagers should answer these questions: *Are you, as a responsible person, capable of owning up to these responsibilities? If faced with them, could you make rational, intelligent choices involving the good and well being of everyone involved?* If you are a man or a woman having heterosexual sex, and, if you cannot answer this question with any integrity or clarity, then you are not ready for sex, no matter which Pagan path you profess.

Sex involves issues of death. No matter your sexual orientation, the unprotected transmission of body fluids can also transmit the HIV virus. There is no cure. In the end, some opportunistic disease that the body could not cure because of the HIV virus is going to kill the person who tests HIV positive. Ask yourself this: *Am I, as a responsible Pagan, capable of owning up to the responsibility of getting the virus and transmitting the virus? Can I accept my own death as a consequence of sex or the death of someone else as the consequence of them having sex with me?* No matter who you are, if you cannot answer these questions with any integrity or clarity, then you are not ready for sex, no matter which Pagan path you profess.

With all these consequences, teen Pagans (or anyone, for that matter) should ask themselves: *Am I prepared and ready to cope with these decisions?* For teenagers, the legal answer is “No.”

Just imagine this conversation with your parents. “Uh, Mom and Dad? I have the Clap (or any of the other afflictions mentioned previously). Could we go to the doctor so that I can be treated?” I would wager that this is not a conversation most teens want to have with their parents. Besides the havoc that this could create within a family, there is an important feature to this situation that many teens overlook: In order to properly take care of yourself, you will probably involve and rely upon an adult. This means that a large part of the responsibility for your actions will fall on someone else. I can practically guarantee that this someone else (your parent or guardian) is not going to be joyful about the situation.

Because a minor cannot handle the effects of their sexual choices without outside adult involvement, I counsel all teen

Pagans to forego sexual activity with other people until they reach the age of consent, which is 18.

What does this mean? This means that at age 18, you can marry in all states without the permission or consent of your parent or guardian. At the age of 18, you can join the military without the advice and consent of your parents; you can sue and be sued; you can vote; you can procure medical treatment without the necessity of involving someone else; and you can get your own bank account without having an adult named on the account with you. In short, you can do everything except get legally drunk. The underlying rationale for this is simple: By the age of 18, the law assumes that you have acquired the requisite mental ability to fully comprehend and understand yourself and the world around you. At this age, the law assumes that you have become a fully functioning human being who is capable of taking care of yourself. I sometimes look at 30-year-old individuals and wonder if this is true for them. I occasionally (as in exceedingly rarely) meet a 17-year-old who is wise beyond his or her years.

None of this alters how it is. Thus, I counsel all teens to keep their sexual urges to themselves until they are 18. Recognizing that we do not live in a perfect world and recognizing that teens appear to mature (their bodies do) with remarkable speed, I understand that not every teen is going to be able to control him or herself until he or she reaches the age of 18. However, self-control is a good thing to learn, especially at an early age. Cultivate it and hold off having sex until you are 18.

So, keep all of this in mind. All the previously mentioned considerations and consequences apply to you. Just because you are a teenager (or the Arch Magician Supreme, for that matter) does not mean that you are immortal or

infallible. Disease, bacteria, lice, crabs, and viruses are equal opportunity destroyers and killers. They do not distinguish between a 14-year-old, a 19-year-old, or a High Priest older than 21. So take heed!

You must protect yourself with the current medical technology and a heavy dose of common sense. Keep the number of your sexual partners at a minimum. Practice safer sex: Use condoms, dental dams, and latex boundaries where appropriate. Do not have intercourse without a condom. Do not practice oral sex without a condom or dental dams. Do not believe that the condom, because it can protect from disease transmission, will absolutely prevent pregnancy. No single contraceptive method is 100- percent foolproof. In order for a condom to work, you have to use it. In order for it to work better at preventing pregnancy, you should use it in conjunction with some other form of birth control, such as spermicide. Be honest with your sexual partners. Try to find a free clinic where you can get some help and at the first sign of trouble; consult an adult and get some help. The problem, whatever it is, is not going to go away if you do not pay attention to it. Fail to pay attention to it and it could kill you, or it could kill someone else. Be responsible. Think of others. Think of yourself. You know, come to think of it, the foregoing advice is good for all Pagans, not just for Pagan teens!

PAGANISM AND SEX MEAN

“RESPONSIBLE CHOICE”

As you can see, this is a bit different from mainstream culture’s prevailing viewpoint.

That viewpoint prefers that individuals remain virgins until they marry, remain married until they die (despite some of the awful things that human beings often do to one another), and have sex (not necessarily enjoy it) only with one's lawfully wedded spouse, who should be a member of the opposite sex. If you are able to live according to the formula here, it is an easy formula to follow. It does not require a person to think very much or to accept the consequences of one's actions. All you have to do is follow the formula.

In contrast, Paganism offers an individual a wide range of personal choices. These choices are to be acted upon responsibly in a safe, sane, consensual fashion and with an eye toward their consequences, not only upon the person making the choices, but upon the other people involved. This can be complicated. Sometimes, we do not always get what we want, but we pile up positive karma points and gain the trust and respect of others. Eventually, things work out.



CHAPTER 5

Where Is Everyone?

Meeting other Pagans, connecting with other Pagans, and networking with other Pagans is truly much easier than anyone thinks. First, there are a lot of us out there. Second, we are becoming less shy about who and what we are. Third, the computer has drastically altered our ability to find other people with similar interests. In this day and age, no one should think that they are alone or that they will never meet other Pagans. With the advent of the computer, this is an obsolete fear. Even if you live in the middle of nowhere, you probably have the means available to expand your horizons considerably and to create opportunities for yourself.

THE COMPUTER HAS CHANGED EVERYTHING

If you own a computer, you possess an invaluable tool for meeting other Pagans. The practical Pagan uses this tool to his or her advantage. Today, computers are similar to phones and answering machines. Almost everyone has

one or has access to one. Thus, you are able to take full advantage of the technology and communication magick that virtual reality has to offer.

Life in a Pagan chat room

Even the most isolated of Pagans, living in the middle of nowhere, can find Pagans on the computer at almost any hour of the day or night. The Internet boasts a variety of Web sites, chat channels, chat rooms, and bulletin boards where Pagans can be found 24/7. Use your search engine or Web browser to find them. Type in *Pagan Chat* or *Witch Chat* or *Celtic Chat*. You will be amazed at what you find.

When chatting with Pagans on the Internet, keep a few things in mind. Most of these established groups have a core group of people who are old friends. These folks have been talking for a long time in these chat rooms. Chances are, they have probably met one another live and in person more than once. At least one group of on-line Pagans I know organizes several group gatherings at different locations around the country every year. From within this group of people, close circles of friends have emerged. They arrange visits and trips with one another all during the year.

So, if you have never been to a Pagan chat room before, do not be intimidated by the “inside” banter that you find. Give an appropriate greeting, such as “Merry Meet” or “Greetings and Salutations.” Introduce yourself, and advise everyone that you are a newbie Pagan or a newbie to the Internet scene. Someone will probably start talking to you.

Be prepared for a few things. First, not everyone is going to talk seriously about Paganism or Pagan-related topics. Some of the people who frequent chat rooms are

very lonely people with no other social outlet. The computer is their social outlet, and the Pagan aspect of the chat room is rather secondary. Second, not everyone is going to agree. Conversation can be lively, volatile, sometimes hostile, and not at all polite. Then at other times, the chat room can be very boring and a regular snooze!

Remember that the chat room phenomenon spans continents. You will find people in the chat rooms from all over the world. Opinions, perspectives, personal experiences, and points of view are going to differ widely. Try not to be too surprised, too shocked, or even too offended.

If stuff gets to you, politely say “adios” and turn the computer off.

However, you can also engage in some very meaningful conversations about Paganism and about life in general. You can make some wonderful friends. You can perform some very useful networking. Participating in a chat room can be a terrific experience if you give it a chance. Please try not to take what goes on in a chat room too seriously.

A special word of caution here. The media is full of horror stories about tragedies that had their origins on the Internet. Let me remind you that life is full of horror stories that began in the natal family, between husbands and wives, among friends, in one’s own parish or congregation, just down the street, at the local tavern, or on the job. You are dealing with people. Just because you meet them on the Internet, just because you are Pagan, and just because they are Pagan does not mean that you should throw caution to the Lords of the Air and start giving out your home address and phone number right away. Do not agree to travel to some faraway place to meet someone after one evening, or a week, or a month of conversation.

Do not invite someone to your house for a weekend visit if you met in a chat room for 30 minutes.

When and if you decide that you want to meet someone from the computer, think of your safety and well-being. No matter the circumstances, no one in this day and age can afford to be completely cavalier about how they conduct themselves. Before agreeing to meet anyone face to face, talk to them for a while (a few weeks or a few months.) Talk to them on the phone. Ask other people in the chat room if anyone has met Person X in real life. What were the personal impressions that folks had of Person X?

If you want to meet someone from the chat room, arrange meetings in public settings first. This way, you have the option to leave if you want to. The practical Pagan uses his or her common sense in these situations.

Life on a Pagan e-mail list

The Internet is also full of Pagan e-mail lists. These are groups of Pagans connected by a server and who post messages to one another, usually 24/7. Virtual reality is full of these. Many Pagan Web sites have associated e-mail lists. I am on several e-mail lists that I found through Pagan Web sites. When you are cruising Web sites and checking in chat rooms, keep your eyes open for references to e-mail lists or bulletin boards that serve Pagans in an area geographically close to you or that address topics of interest to you. You may wish to get onto a bulletin board for Celtic Witches or for Norse Shamans—whatever your particular interest happens to be. There might even be a Pagan e-mail list that serves your particular location.

Everything applicable to life in a Pagan chat room is applicable to life on a Pagan e-mail list. Once on the e-mail

list, send an introductory post concerning yourself. Keep it simple.

Make it known that you are a newbie to the computer or that you are just discovering and exploring your Paganism, whatever you believe to be particularly pertinent. Again, do not give away your home phone number or address right away. You will receive some nice, polite responses. Then, watch the topics of conversation for a while and, when you feel comfortable, post a message. Not everyone will agree; do not be disappointed or offended by this. However, someone will agree with you, or they will offer you some new insights that you had not previously considered. You will be off and running!

People are not always going to agree. Some of the postings can be quite trivial. An e-mail list usually has a moderator, someone who formulates the rules for the list and who makes sure that everyone plays by the rules. Some e-mail lists have very flexible rules and very tolerant moderators. Other e-mail lists have very stringent rules and very strict moderators who carefully monitor all the postings to be sure that everyone is playing by the rules.

Look at Web sites for any e-mail lists that you think you want to join. Usually, the last few postings to the list are available. Read them over. Take a look at the archives for the list, if they are available to you. E-mail the moderator directly and ask pertinent questions. If it looks like a group you would like to join, then sign up! Remember that you can always unsubscribe yourself to the list if you feel that it is not working out for you.

Life on a Pagan Web site

The Internet brings the world to your fingertips. This is some really big magick!

Books and ritual items can be ordered directly from the Internet: herbs, jewelry, clothes, incenses, oils, teas, runes, tarot cards, swords, athames, chalices, cauldrons, shoes, boots—you name it and it can be ordered from the Internet!

The Internet is loaded with Pagan Web sites. Groups, covens, circles, organizations, festivals, and individuals all have Web sites. Insert a few key phrases into your browser of search engine. You will get dozens of responses. Several of my favorite web sites are The Witches' Voice (www.witchvox.com), The Pagan Education Network (www.bloomington.in.us/~pen/), Circle Sanctuary (www.circlesanctuary.org), The Alternative Religions Education Network (www.aren.org), and The Wiccan Pagan Times (www.twpt.com). For the military Pagan, please take a look at The Military Pagan Network (milpagan.org). A thorough exploration of just one of these sites can take several hours!

If you are looking for books, several large national book companies have on-line Web sites from which you can order most anything you have a title or an author for. There are book companies that exist exclusively on the net, such as *Amazon.com*. If you are timid about going into a book store and buying Pagan books, if you have no book store near you, or if you think that your local book-store would not order Pagan books for you, have no fear! This can all be done on the computer and in the privacy of your home, without incurring strange stares or lots of unwanted attention.

There are a number of Pagan publications that have Web sites: *Sage Woman* (www.sagewoman.com) and *Pan Gaia* (www.pangaia.com) are just a couple examples of Pagan journals that can be found while cruising the Net.

Unfortunately, at the time of this writing, *Green Egg* is no longer in publication. You can subscribe to most existing Pagan journals over the Internet or over the phone.

Almost all the Pagan journals and publications have Classified Sections where you can find Pagan folk looking for pen pals, trying to strike up correspondence of some sort, and so forth. Additionally, there are listings for festivals, events, and gatherings nationwide in most Pagan periodicals. If you truly feel that you are all alone in the middle of the prairie or sitting alone on top of some butte somewhere, you might try putting pen to paper and acquiring a pen pal if any of the advertisements appear promising to you.

Eventually what will happen is that all this work on the computer is going to yield some up-close and personal results. You will be invited somewhere. You will find out about some festival or gathering. You will meet someone close to where you live. Eventually, you will acquire information from the computer that will lead to an in-person experience. It might take a little time, but stick with it. Computer networking is the wave of the future. Many Pagans begin with the computer and eventually wind up at Pagan festivals in no time. The computer can open doors for you if you use manners, common sense, and caution.

I WANT TO MEET OTHER PAGANS, BUT I DON'T KNOW WHERE TO BEGIN

If you live in the suburbs of a large city or if you live within reasonable driving distance of a large city, you should use all your computer expertise, networking, and know-how to find out about the Pagan happenings in your area, including the nearest city. If your computer

networking has not been able to provide this for you, you might plan a trip into the city for the day. Stop someplace with a phone book or a yellow pages. Look under listings such as “New Age,” “Occult,” “Metaphysical,” “Herbs,” “Crystals,” and “Bookstores.”

Make a list of addresses and telephone numbers. Get a good map, and go visit these places. Most stores frequented by Pagans carry a wide variety of merchandise: books, drums, candles, crystals, jewelry, music, periodicals, incense, herbs, soaps, clothes, and so forth. Remember the great old stores with posters, black lights, music, tie-dye products, and incense? These places were head shops, and modern Pagan shopping establishments are very similar to the head shops of the 1960s and 1970s. The focuses of the modern Pagan store, however, are spirituality and magick. These establishments are wonderful to browse in and, by their very nature, they emanate positive vibrations. Even if I am broke, I like to just be in them. They are relaxing and energizing at the same time. These places are the head shops of the new millennium!

Afficionados of Pagan browsing and window shopping have favorite places to frequent.

You will know, as soon as you walk in the door, whether you have found what you are looking for or not. You will feel at ease, comfortable, and like a kid in a candy store. You will feel as if you could spend hours in the place and still not experience everything. Relax. Take a deep breath. Just mosey around. Have a good time. Don't hurry. If you need help with anything, ask the folks who work in the store if they have what you are looking for.

Strike up a conversation with the people working in the shop. Ask them about the local Pagan scene. Chances are, the shop will carry flyers, a magazine, or a local newspaper

that caters to the New Age/Metaphysical/Occult/Pagan scene. If you are not interested in New Age things or the Occult, do not worry. Do not be put off by mere titles. You are performing a type of networking. You will eventually get to where you want to be.

Make sure you ask about places where the local Pagans might hang out. Pagan folk love to congregate in coffee shops, natural food stores, library outlets, bookstores, and juice bars.

You can probably get some very good tips on where to find the local Pagan crowd.

The local avant garde newspaper probably carries information for all these areas of interest. Such a newspaper, or maybe just the local paper, will probably carry notices of classes, workshops, and seminars from local schools or colleges. Your ears should perk up when you see seminars on drumming, on Goddess awareness, and on the Earth. Make arrangements to attend some of these events. You may make some important connections.

The shop(s) you find may or may not have conference/teaching space. Some of these places are like little mini-universities or conference centers. That is, they will have regular meetings, workshops, or seminars of interest to you. Get a schedule. There could be an event or series of meetings that would be valuable to attend if only for the chance of meeting other Pagans or people with similar interests.

If you finally work up enough courage to attend a seminar or workshop, remember that this is probably not the time to be shy, but nor is it the time to act like a bull in a china shop.

Most seminars these days have a brief introductory section. Everyone gets a minute or two in the beginning to

introduce him or herself. You might say something such as this: *"Hi, my name is Dana. I recently became very interested in Paganism, and I am here to meet people, to network, and hopefully to learn something. I am very glad to be here."*

After this, participate and enjoy yourself! Pay attention not only to the content of the program you are attending, but also to the people who are attending. You may notice someone who appears to have similar interests or who says something that you can really relate to. Try to strike up a conversation with this person at a convenient point, on a break, or at the end of the seminar. You may be surprised!

As I mentioned earlier, Pagan folk love to hang out together. On any given night of the week, but especially on Fridays and Saturdays, you can probably find Pagans frequenting local coffee shops. More often than not, these coffee shops are going to be in the avant-garde, eclectic, or artsy part of town. The scene in these parts of town will be very colorful and widely diverse. Look closely. The Pagan folk are probably there. These are the places that support a cutting-edge sort of culture. They might closely resemble Haight Ashbury in the 1960s. Such a local hang-out may advertise in the paper you picked up at the store or conference center previously discussed.

If you visit one of these places, look for the people wearing noticeably Pagan jewelry such as crystals, pentacles, god/goddess figures, talismanic symbols, and so on. You might be so fortunate as to find people wearing T-shirts that say these sorts of things: Pagan and Proud; Born Again Pagan; Never Again the Burning; or Goddesses Do Not Have to Be Anorexic. If you have any crystals, pentacle jewelry, or other jewelry of faith that identifies you as a

Pagan, wear it. If you have any Pagan books, you might try taking one or two of them into the coffee shop, place one casually in plain sight on the table, and at least try to read the other. Chances are, one of the local Pagan folk will stop and chat with you a while. I have Pagan bumper stickers on my car. I have been so fortunate as to find notes and postcards from other Pagans on my windshield while my car has been parked in some very posh neighborhoods or at my doctor's office! Don't be afraid to follow up on little clues such as this.

After you have struck up a conversation, ask about the local Pagan scene. Are there any Pagans with interests similar to yours? Where do they hang out? How do you get in contact with them? Are there any open groups, open rituals, or local study groups you might join? Without being too pushy, try to acquire e-mail addresses, Web site URLs, names, and telephone numbers. Do not be too disappointed if you meet with a little resistance. Some Pagans are still very cautious about whom they talk to and may be reluctant to give out personal information. If you expect to get something such as a telephone number, you should be prepared to give your telephone number. Use your common sense, be polite, and pay attention to the people who stop and talk to you.

Remember: This is about networking. This is not about following someone that you just met all around town. Do not go anywhere alone with anyone you have just met. Strike up a conversation, acquire some information, develop a correspondence somehow, and over time you will meet people that you will come to like and trust.

Some Pagan communities are very active and quite organized. They sponsor things such as Pagan Night Out, where the local Pagans get together and all go hang out in

some designated establishment for the evening, open rituals, open parties, or lectures/discussions. You can usually find their flyers and literature at any of the places you have been visiting.

When speaking with the local Pagan folk and when looking in flyers and in newspapers, look for a Pagan Calendar of Events. If you attend one of these events, pay attention to the people. Listen to what they are saying. Remember that people are people: Some of them will be kind, polite, and knowledgeable. Some of them may appear to be obnoxious, rude, and ignorant. You know what you are looking for, and you are not required to hang out with people you don't like just because you are all Pagans.

If you sense that someone is scoping you out just for a quick roll in the hay, remind yourself that you do not have to play this game, unless you want to. Politely excuse yourself and move onto another conversation. If you sense that someone is playing God and is passing him or herself off as knowing everything, just remember that this is not church, and you are not required to sit and listen while this or that person rains down wisdom from above. If you simply do not feel safe or comfortable with someone, remove yourself from his or her company. Remember: You are not required to do anything, especially if it makes you feel unsafe or uncomfortable.

A common complaint among newcomers who finally get up enough courage to go to something is that no one notices that they are new and that no one comes over to talk to them. Sometimes, this is the result of poor organization or mere hectic goings-on. Try not to take this personally, and see if you can find someone who is an organizer or a leader. Who are these people? They probably made announcements, created name tags, served

food, conducted ritual, or were a speaker at the seminar you attended. Walk up and introduce yourself. Strike up a conversation. Tell them what you are interested in and find out if there is someone present to whom you can speak about your interests.

Another common complaint among Pagans who attend events is that they suddenly feel intimidated because they don't seem to know any of the local organizers, movers, or shakers. They feel suddenly intimidated because they are just "out there," equipped only with what they know and their curiosity. Almost everyone feels like this at one point in time. I know that I did. It took me a while to get up enough courage to get "out there" into the local Pagan community. Just because you are new, just because you might not be terribly well connected, just because you have been doing your own thing on your own for a long, long while does not make what you think or believe invalid, wrong, or less important. If what you think, believe, and practice works for you, then you have accomplished a great deal in your spiritual journey. There are probably folks who think similar to the way you do. You just have to find them. Again, do not be afraid to approach event organizers and talk to them. They should be willing to talk to you, to make introductions, and to help you network.

If, after a few weeks, you have met some interesting people, keep up your contacts with them. Stay in touch via the phone and/or e-mail. Stay abreast of the goings-on and the events that people are attending. You will probably begin to receive invitations to events. You may even be asked to join a study group or attend a ritual with a local group or coven. You might be asked to join a local organization. Take your time and be careful if you are asked to make a commitment or join anything at this point. You

are not required to join anything. If you are interested, attend a study group meeting or go to a ritual hosted by some of your newfound acquaintances. It is always a good idea to attend an event or two as a means of research to see if you want to join or affiliate yourself with these people. If you begin to feel uncomfortable or threatened in any way, politely excuse yourself. If there is anyone with whom you feel a special bond, you might call him or her later and talk about your experience, be it good or bad. Education and communication are essential to networking. They are essential to meeting people. And try to remember that this is fun. You should be enjoying yourself!

I WANT TO MEET PEOPLE IN PERSON, BUT I LIVE IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE

Do you think that you live in the middle of nowhere? Do you believe that there are no Pagans where you live? I was the Chairperson for a Pagan festival that was held for several years in a tiny town in the Ozark Mountains of Missouri. To my amazement, there were several Pagans in the area, several Pagan-friendly folks in the area, and quite a few Pagan-curious folks in the area. Even if you live in East Overshoe, there is someone close by who is Pagan.

Of course, finding them can be tricky. There probably won't be any 24-hour coffeehouses that cater to alternative lifestyles or avant garde newspapers around with fairly cosmopolitan Classified sections. You may have to travel to the nearest big town or to the nearest city to find potential Pagan watering holes. If you have been successful with the computer, you may have found a few people in your area.

Do not be afraid to use online resources. I am listed as a Pagan contact on The Witches' Voice (www.witchvox.com).

People send me e-mail all the time. Usually, they start off by apologizing. Don't apologize! Folks who list themselves as resources usually love to interact with other Pagans. (If we didn't, we would not list ourselves as contact people!) If you have found someone in your area through the computer, contact him or her through e-mail. Strike up a conversation. Stick with it. Talk to him or her on the phone and eventually, if you would like to, agree to meet in some public place. I have done this several times and have consistently had very good results.

By now, you are performing the vital Pagan function of networking—that is, you are establishing a web of contacts that will be quite important to you in your quest to meet other Pagans.

I WANT TO MEET OTHER PAGANS, BUT I LIVE IN THE BIG, BAD CITY

The previous discussions obviously apply to you. If you scratch the surface hard enough in almost every big city in America, you are going to find the Pagan folk. Chances are, a large network of Pagans already exists in the big city wherein you reside. Use all of the hints, tips, and general guidelines previously mentioned to hook up, tune in, and get online!

There are probably seasonal events or celebrations going on. Just because the weather is cold does not mean that Pagan events stop or come to a halt. Not all Pagans camp all the time in the wilderness. There are Pagan gatherings, festivals, and events that occur at hotels and conference centers. Look for listings in the local media. Watch for flyers at the local Pagan hangouts, shops, and watering

holes. If you are worried about not knowing anyone, ask a friend of yours to go along with you. You do not have to stay for everything. There is usually an admission charge, which should get you into most everything offered at the event. You can pick and choose what you would like to attend, and you can leave whenever you want.

Of course, other interesting places to meet Pagans are big gatherings and festivals. In the Spring, Summer, and early Fall months, these events are usually held out-of-doors over long weekends (Friday, Saturday, and Sunday). Some of these events, such as Pagan Spirit Gathering, can occur over an entire week. (For more on Pagan Spirit Gathering, visit Web site of its sponsor, Circle Sanctuary, at www.circlesanctuary.org/page2.html. Check under the “events” section.) In the colder months, some Pagan events are held indoors at hotels. Magickal Weekend, held in the St. Louis, Missouri, area and Invocation (ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/eaglestar/invocati.htm), held in the Chicago, Illinois, area, are two examples.

These sorts of events are usually advertised in Pagan periodicals and journals. Usually, there are Web pages or links for them on the Internet. These events are great learning opportunities. There will be workshops and seminars. You will meet authors, teachers, advocates, and other interesting people. Attendance at a good Pagan event has been known to seriously impact the lives of those who attend.

For camping events, remember that they are, first and foremost, camping events. They require the same sort of planning, attention, and care that you would put into any camping or canoe event. You must consider the weather, camping gear, food, insect repellent, beverages, really basic hygiene (such as toilet paper), water supplies,

first aid equipment, sleeping gear, and waste disposal. Some outdoor Pagan events have facilities for the camping-impaired—that is, for people who have genuine physical limitations and simply cannot pitch and maintain a camp. If you are such a person and would like to go to a camping Pagan event, simply contact the event organizers and explain yourself to them. Event organizers work very hard to include everyone. Remember that facilities for the camping-impaired are probably limited in number, and you need to make your reservation for such facilities at a Pagan event well in advance.

Pagan events situated in a hotel are a little different. The basic niceties of life, such as toilets, hot and cold running water, fresh drinking water, waste disposal, food, and climate control, are all provided! Remember that hotels can be expensive, so plan accordingly. Many people who attend hotel events pack coolers and make plans to carpool to other local food establishments for less expensive meals.

Whether at a camping event or a hotel event, one of the problems that many first-time attendees experience is a form of energy overload. There are so many Pagans, so many workshops, and so much energy concentrated in one place that some people experience a form of energy sickness. Light-headedness, dizziness, an inability to focus and concentrate, and a general spaced-out feeling are good indicators of energy overload. Event organizers usually plan for these things, and there are centering/grounding stations with facilitators to help attendees cope with energy overload. Take advantage of these services. They are there for your comfort and safety. Do not be shy! If you are at an outdoor event, remember to stay well hydrated, get enough sleep, eat appropriately, and keep yourself

comfortable in terms of sun exposure and heat. These are genuine factors to consider when trying to maintain your overall health and well being at an outdoor Pagan event, or even a hotel event. Sometimes, people get so excited that they forget to eat, don't get enough sleep, or do not drink enough fluids to maintain their bodies.

If you plan to attend a Pagan festival or event, register in advance and obtain some literature. Peruse the Web site for the event. You will need to educate yourself on what to expect and what to pack. Hopefully, by the time you decide to attend one of these, you will have met people who have already attended your chosen event or a similar event, and they can talk to you about what to expect and how to prepare.



I FOUND SOME REALLY GREAT PAGANS, AND NOW I WANT TO JOIN SOMETHING

Becoming a member of a coven, circle, or some other form of spiritual observance group is serious business. Trying to start or run such an organization is difficult work,

and this book is not about how to form such a thing or how to run it. However, if you are asked to become a member of a spiritual observance group, there are some things you should keep in mind.

You probably would not attend a school or college without having done some research ahead of time. Joining a spiritual observance group is a decision of similar importance. You should be prepared to do some research ahead of time.

First, you should meet everyone who is a member or who will be a member. You need to know these people on a personal level. Talk to them, find out what they think and feel and why, visit their homes, have them visit your home, and question them about their spiritual beliefs and values. Question them about their lives and what is important to them. Be prepared to answer the same sorts of questions. You should be comfortable with these people's values, ethics, and beliefs. You do not need to all agree on everything, but you should share several acres of similar ground.

Second, you should not feel any pressure to join. If you feel that you are being backed into a corner and are not being given the right amount of time and space to make your decision, chances are, you will not be happy once you have joined. Politely decline the invitation at present and continue to look around.

Third, you should not be required to have sex with anyone just to get in. You should not be required to "share" your spouse, your fiancée, your significant other, your steady, your squeeze, or your date just to get in. I respectfully suggest that if this is the case, these people have an agenda other than spiritual observance. Politely decline the invitation at present and definitely continue to look around.

Fourth, ask questions about these folks in the community at large. Unfortunately, Pagans gossip the same way everyone else does. If you hear anything particularly bad or awful, you might want to seek out the person who drew the poor comments and talk to this individual about his or her truth or lack of truth. In nearly every situation, there are at least two sides to the story (and maybe more). You might want to speak to the person and make your own decision in the matter. If you are made to feel like you committed some horrible sin just by asking around, you might begin to question the stability of the group you have been asked to join (and the stability of its members). If you're questioned as to why you are asking around, politely tell your questioner that you would like to know what you are getting into before you get into it. Solid, stable, and secure people will not resent your interest and the care you take to protect yourself. They will talk to you openly, honestly, and without hostility. Such people have nothing to hide.

Finally, find someone who used to be a member of this group and politely inquire why he or she is no longer a member. Many times, there was a personal squabble, a disagreement on how to do things, or a fundamental disagreement on philosophy or practice. What you are looking for is whether there still exists a degree of good will and respect among these people. If the person who left was hexed, cursed, or in some way maligned by the group that this person left, then you should seriously consider whether you want to join such an outfit. If you find this to be the case, politely decline the invitation and go about your business.

You may find the number of teaching groups to be limited. You may discover that they simply cannot take

you into their midst right away. This is not a personal insult, so please do not take it as such. Teaching groups are at a minimum—that is, there are actually very few of them out there. For those that do exist, the demands on the members' time are enormous. Teaching is a big responsibility; and in addition to teaching, the members, themselves, are trying to grow spiritually. It is difficult to do both at once. If you have found a teaching group that you would like to join, but if it cannot take you right away, ask to be put on the waiting list. Stay in contact with the group. Eventually a spot will open up for you. In the meantime, continue to learn and educate yourself on your own by reading, attending events, and working on your own form of practice. Do not be overwhelmed by everything you don't know. There is a lot that most of us do not know. Once, after reading a very good article in a Pagan journal, I called my teacher at 2 a.m. I was very upset at what I did not know. As a Pagan, you have embarked upon a lifelong path of discovery and education. You will be learning all the way along; it will not happen all at once.

Some Pagan communities are well organized and have some measure of centralization. This probably sounds antithetical to Paganism in general, yet it is true. If you would like to join any Pagan organization in your town or city, find out when and where it meets. Ask to attend several meetings. Watch what goes on. Pay attention. Do these people get anything done? Are they sponsoring worthwhile events? Are they educating themselves, their community, and the community in which they live? If the answers to these questions are "yes," then you may have found a viable organization to which you would like to belong. If the answers to these questions are "no," do not be discouraged. If you are discouraged, chances are that other

Pagans in your community feel the same way. You might be instrumental in creating an organization that can sponsor worthwhile events, perform community education, and provide forms of Pagan outreach.

Some local Pagan groups have e-mail lists that you could ask to join or monitor for a little while. It would give you some idea of what these people are like and what they are accomplishing. Remember that Pagans are like any other group of people. There will be disagreements about what to do and how to do it. The proof of the pudding is in how the people comport themselves in their discussions and negotiations. There will be strong personalities involved—that is, there will be people with strong opinions. There will be people who disagree with them. Do not be put off by any of this. This is usual stuff for any organization. It may color your decision to join or just how involved you want to be after you join.

If you are going to join a Pagan organization of any type, think about how you wish to be valued as a member. Do you want to be viewed as someone who pays attention, works hard, and takes part, or do you want to be viewed as someone who just hangs on or exists on the fringes?

As in any organization, there will be a group of people who work hard, a group of people who do what their lives and schedules will allow, and a group of people who do nothing. If you volunteer to work, be honest with yourself about your ability to actually do the work for which you are volunteering. If you really don't have the time, then you might want to wait until you do have the time. If you have already volunteered and if something happens in your personal life that will affect your ability to do your job, then tell your coworkers. They will understand. What they

will not understand is someone who signs up, gets assigned a job, does not do the job, and disappears without telling anyone why he or she disappeared. This leaves your co-workers, your organization, and your event in a bad spot. Someone will have to cover for you and make up what you were unable to do. We all understand that life happens, but you need to tell someone when it happens to you so that other arrangements can be made to handle the gap that your absence will create.

Regarding study groups or discussion groups, these are usually very loosely organized and probably meet on a somewhat irregular schedule. However, some study/discussion groups are very well organized and keep to a rigorous, disciplined schedule. The practical Pagan uses common sense. Attend a few meetings. Ask questions. Pay attention and observe what is going on. Do these people share your interests? Are they reading/discussing things that are of interest to you? If they are not covering topics and material of interest to you, then your joining them would probably be a useless endeavor. You would probably be better off starting your own study/discussion group.

In short, there are a lot of Pagan folk out there in the world. You can find them most anywhere if you use a little common sense, some ingenuity, and allow your natural curiosity to lead you. Dig a little deeper, and you will probably find more than one Pagan who thinks as you do. No Pagan is an island!



CHAPTER 6

Help! There Is No Pagan K-Mart!

Okay, you're a Pagan. You know what you are not, and you have a pretty good idea of what you are and what you believe in. You have settled upon a code of conduct that you can live with. You are starting to make your connections with The Great What Is. You found some people with whom you feel comfortable and who share some of your core beliefs and values. You have decided that you would like to hang out with them.

It is at this point that a lot of Pagans begin to look at themselves, their living environment, and their stuff and think: *I need to clothe myself and my world with the appropriate attire and decor. I am going to go to a Pagan event. Oh my Goddess! What am I going to wear?*

NOW THAT I AM PAGAN, I HAVE NOTHING TO WEAR

One of the interesting things about Pagans is their choice of garments, jewelry, and accessories. Pagans have some of the coolest stuff that I have ever seen, from their

toe rings and ear cuffs to their hip flasks. Even their tattoos are exquisitely beautiful. There are plenty of Pagans out there with plenty of stuff, and this includes their wardrobe. However, Pagans can also be remarkably simple in their choices. Perhaps the simplest of all choices is the decision to go skyclad.

What is skyclad? It is the Pagan term for nude, naked, bare as a baby's bottom. Yes, there are Pagans who go to festivals and rituals and who wear absolutely nothing. The practical Pagan understands that going skyclad occurs only in the most controlled of circumstances—that is, at private rituals held in a private setting, or at private gatherings in a private setting, or at certain festivals where attendance is controlled and, for the most part, where all the attendees are Pagan.

Is there such a thing as “public nudity” in Paganism? Let's be serious about this. Can you expect to see nude Pagans at some coffee house or at a ritual in a public park? I highly doubt it. Society at large simply is not that comfortable with nudity, and there are laws against public nudity. Someone walking down a public street in his or her birthday suit is going to win a free ride in a police car. The practical Pagan understands and recognizes that his or her sense of personal freedom, as symbolized by their nudity, is not shared by the more mainstream culture. So only the foolhardy Pagan goes to ritual in the park on a Solstice afternoon clad only in his or her jewelry.

I hate to disappoint all the voyeurs out there, but Pagans keep their clothes on, for the most part, except for private rituals performed in private, safe, and secure settings and except for some Pagan gatherings, where being skyclad is permissible. I have never been to a festival or gathering where being skyclad was mandatory. I have been

to some rituals where going nude was mandatory; however, I was told this before the ritual, and it was my choice whether to attend or not.

One day, such a choice will probably be yours to make. At many of the larger Pagan gatherings and festivals, Pagans have the option of going skyclad. This means that if an individual chooses to attend the gathering in the buff, then that individual is free to do so. It does not mean that you or anyone else is required to go naked. You can continue to wear your blue jeans and t-shirts, your ankle-length broomstick skirts, or your khaki shorts and hiking boots, if this is your pleasure. However, I can practically guarantee that within five minutes of your arrival at such an event, you will probably be greeted by perfectly happy Pagans wearing little more than a smile. Trust me: You get over it in about five minutes.

Several summers ago, I went to my first large, outdoor Pagan gathering. Just after getting the car inside the sanctuary, I was confronted with a veritable platoon of Pagan men in hiking boots, tool belts, and smiles. They were not wearing anything else. They were going to put a roof on one of the newly constructed public buildings at the sanctuary. I was trying to remain calm and nonchalant. This was a great view!

My girlfriend in the front passenger seat giggled wickedly, delighted that she had brought her water pistol. All day long, naked people strolled up and down the roads and the paths, as casual as you please. They were not self-conscious about their nudity, and very few other people seemed to be ill at ease. The naked people ranged in age from children to elders. That evening, several naked people bounced in and out of our camp. By this time, I was so desensitized to the whole thing that my main concern was

how close to the fire they were. Goddess forbid that they should sing anything important!

When my time came to be dedicated as a priestess of the Goddess, I went to the Crone High Priestess, who was one of my teachers at the time, and asked her if she would perform the dedication. I had studied and worked hard. I had performed a lot of community service. I had been teaching myself. She looked at me quite seriously and advised that, of all the rituals she performed, this was the one ritual where she insisted that everyone, particularly me, was naked.

I was rather taken aback. I gulped and asked her if I really had to do it naked, and she told me that this was her rule and that I could probably find someone who would dedicate me clothed, but that if I wanted her to do it, we would have to be naked. When I asked her why her insistence was so strong, she told me that I needed to be completely at ease with myself and my body, that I had to be willing to let the magick flow through me and around with any restraints whatsoever, and that this ritual represented an act of perfect trust, which symbolized my birth into a higher realm of consciousness. With stunning clarity, I realized that I was not ready to do this, and I told her so. She told me, quite bluntly, that I was right, that I was not ready, and that I needed more work.

Back to the drawing board. I worked for another year and, by that time, when she gave me the same speech, I went into the ritual joyfully. I was ready. It was a beautiful and powerful experience. I chose the participants at the ritual, and they were people I had known a long time, had great respect for, and had deep, abiding love for. They felt the same way about me. No one seemed awkward or ill at ease. I tend to be rather embarrassed about my large body,

but one participant compared me to the figurine of the Goddess found at Willendorf. This particular presentation of the Goddess shows her to have a very round and rotund body. Not all goddesses or modern Pagan women have the physical bodies of a romance-novel heroine.

Including that piece of work, some of the most powerful magickal and transforming work I have ever done was performed skyclad. It was not undertaken with a sense of voyeurism. It was done because it was the best way to get the work at hand done. Ritual nudity can be stunningly beautiful and effective. It is not a choice to be undertaken lightly, even if you are working alone. Being naked before your gods or before your beliefs is a humbling experience.

To be clothed or unclothed is a choice that the individual makes. If you don't want to be naked, then don't be naked. Ask the facilitator of a ritual if nudity is required. If the ritual requires nudity, then just don't participate if you feel you are not ready. You might be told that you may wear clothes, if you wish, but that you might not get the full effect of the ritual. The facilitator of the ritual is just telling you the facts as he or she sees them. Don't be offended by this. If you have the option to participate clothed or semi-clothed, then take part! It will be a wonderful learning experience for you.

Um, I would like to wear clothes, please

The choice of clothing worn by Pagans varies widely. The practical Pagan dresses appropriately for the occasion. For Pagan events and rituals, Pagans sometimes adorn themselves in carefully planned, expensive, and exquisite garb, and sometimes Pagans adorn themselves in only their naked splendor. The choice is entirely yours to

make. However, as choices appear to go in Pagandom, the dilemma of what to wear can often be confounding.

Do you have to wear antique clothing from a vintage clothing store or expensive velvet Gothic dresses with leather corsets? No, you don't have to wear them. I have known some Pagan folk to wrap beautiful swaths of fabric or sarongs around their bodies, go barefoot, and let their hair down. This was sufficient. They looked wonderful. Do you have to wear flowing capes with voluminous hoods? They look great, but no, you do not have to wear them. I have seen Pagans manufacture the most amazing things from old blankets and couch throws. It is the imagination in the creation and the panache with which you wear something that count. There are Pagans who make a simple smile look like haute couture clothing.



I DON'T WANT TO LOOK LIKE EVERYONE ELSE, BUT I WANT TO FIT IN

To most non-Pagan folk, Pagans appear to be refugees from the 1960s or from a Stevie Nicks concert. Most Pagans revel in this pure fashion freedom. To Pagans, the two pressing questions at this point usually are: *What is appropriate to wear, and where do I get it?*

Ritual garb, for most Pagans, is most easily compared to the “go to church on Sunday” dress. These are the clothes, jewelry, and accessories that are worn only for and are specifically reserved for ritual or other sacred work. Ritual garb can be as elaborate as historically accurate costumes from another period in history to something as simple as a leather G-string. Again, these choices are entirely up to the wearer! Ritual garb consists of special items. Depending on the tradition or ritual, such apparel for women can range from handmade deerskin dresses to sheer, diaphanous sarongs. Men may be seen sporting kilts, robes, loincloths, or even broomstick skirts.

A word on this “men in skirts” phenomenon: Part of the Pagan ethos is the discovery of parts of ourselves that have been historically forbidden in other spiritual traditions. In our culture, men have been forbidden the great luxury, comfort, and convenience of wearing cotton skirts against their bare legs, just as for centuries women were forbidden the great luxury of trousers, pants, shorts, slacks, and a rational swimming suit! At festivals, gatherings, and rituals, one of the most loved sights is that of men in skirts. I, for one, find men in long, cotton broomstick skirts or Indian style skirts to be very attractive. Keep a watch out for them. You will see what I mean!

Clothing that is worn only for ritual use quickly accumulates the special, wonderful energy of ritual. Clothing worn only during magickal work becomes saturated with the magick worked while in it. Thus, the clothing itself becomes a large reservoir of power and magick.

The very act of putting on these special items can transport the wearer into another realm of consciousness.

Some covens or similar spiritual groups have matching garb—that is, everyone wears the same thing to ritual. In such a group, there are usually several very talented seamstresses and tailors who outfit the members. In other covens or spiritual groups, everyone is free to wear whatever they please to ritual as long as it is within a certain theme. For example, in some covens, it is believed that a belt cuts off the energetic body, so no one wears belts. In other covens, everyone must wear a cape with a hood or be decked out in clothes from a specific time period.

The beliefs, thought processes, and magickal workings of a spiritual group will often influence what its members wear.

A word of warning here: The fashion choices made by a spiritual group should not be the basis for a decision of whether to join said group. Hopefully, the seeker is looking for spiritual enlightenment, personal growth, magickal experience, that sort of thing, and not justification for looking like a painter's model from the Italian Renaissance. As great as those folks looked in their duds, this should not be the reason why a modern spiritual seeker chooses to join a specific prayer group or coven. The focus of such a choice should be spirituality. Once in ritual, the focus is on the ritual and not on what the High Priestess is wearing, or not wearing, as the case may be.

If you have been invited to a Pagan party or a Pagan event such as a Spring gala and are utterly clueless about what to wear, call your host and/or hostess. Ask what is expected and/or acceptable attire. Chances are, it will be quite informal and most eclectic. Rest assured that many Pagan folk are comfortable in blue jeans, t-shirts, casual sweaters, sneakers, and so on.

DRESS APPROPRIATELY FOR THE EVENT, ESPECIALLY FOR EMPLOYMENT

The practical Pagan exercises common sense and knows that what one wears to the festival in the woods over the weekend is not what one wears to the office or to a mundane cocktail party. Prom formals are not appropriate to the workplace, and neither are flowing-sleeved velvet gowns with matching leather belts upon which one hangs an athame.

What if you are asked to give a speech or a talk in a non-Pagan environment? What do you wear? It is usually helpful if one does not scare the natives too badly. This usually means looking somewhat normal. When I am asked to speak to a school group, university group, or some other group that I know is not Pagan, I try not to egg them on or frighten them too badly. I usually don my work togs and go in looking like the lawyer I am. I do, however, wear my gold pentacle necklace everywhere, including court! I have never been threatened, nor have I felt threatened by members of the legal community, by my bosses, or by judges.

Some of the biggest costume parties I ever went to were civil trials. I am, by nature, a flamboyant dresser. I was a flamboyant dresser before I made my first forays into the Pagan world. Left to my own devices, I am inclined to

wear lots of jewelry, ancient Egyptian style makeup, and flowing clothing that drapes comfortably around my body. My body is large, and I adore comfort. When it came time for trial, however, I dressed to fit the part: The makeup got toned down, the big jewelry went away (and there was a whole lot less of it on my person), my hairstyle became softer and more conservative. In short, I dressed to fit the part. On one of these occasions, my coworkers and boss looked at me as if they had never seen me before.

I began my life in the office with a basic plan. I went to work every day on time, did the job expected of me and then some, and established myself as an integral member of “the team” in every office that I worked in. When I first got out of law school, I did not wear pentacles or other more obvious religious symbols to interviews or to jobs in the first several months. I did wear crystals, ankhs, scarabs, and ancient Egyptian symbols. These things just looked trendy, unusual, artsy, and avant garde to people. I just wore jewelry that looked as if it came out of the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art catalog. I put very ancient images in my office: Egyptian and Greco-Roman posters, statuary, and so forth. It fit the theme of my jewelry.

People liked to come in and ask me about these things. They got the standard history lecture: *“Oh, yes. I got that at the Chicago Field Museum while their Egyptian exhibit was there. Did you go? Oh, you should have! It was fabulous! I liked it so much that I went twice. Well, this is a statue of Anubis. He is one of the ancient Egyptian gods. He was a Guardian of the Dead, and after someone died, he weighed the soul on the scales against the Feather of Truth. That scene is on the frame papyrus over here. Doesn’t that just look like a scale of justice to you? And you know, the woman holding the scales that all the lawyers have?”*

She is Themis, the ancient Greek goddess representing Justice. Cool, huh?"

Eventually, people figured out that I was very well versed in history, ancient mythology, and archaeology. After a while, I started to wear small pentacles. People who noticed asked questions. They got the standard response: *"This is a symbol of my faith. It represents the basic elements of the Universe, which are Earth, Air, Fire, Water, and Spirit, all enclosed by the never- ending Hoop of Life."* They usually did not ask much else. By then, they were so used to my "quirks" and my "hobbies" that it really was no big deal in the office.

As for clients, if I were meeting a new client, I usually kept the Pagan jewelry to a discrete minimum. After I had met with the client several times, worked on the case, and had established that I was competent and confidant, then the jewelry slowly began to emerge. By this time, however, I found that very few clients were concerned about my jewelry; they were really concerned with how well I was managing their cases.

As for judges and courts, I wore crystals and ancient cultural symbols first, while I worked on gaining the respect of the bench. After two years of so of practice before the courts, I began to wear pentacles. Frankly, no one ever bothered to say anything except once, and that was not over my pentacle; it was over my picture being in the paper.

PAGAN SHOPPING IS AN ART FORM

At a recent Spring fling sponsored by CAST in St. Louis, fashion ensembles ranged from one-shouldered evening gowns and belly-dancing costumes for women to

formal kilts and Japanese hakima for men. (For more information about CAST, refer back to Chapter 4.) Depending on the event, you might be wearing anything from nothing at all to historically accurate High Italian Renaissance garb. Where are you going to find this stuff? Surprisingly, there is a lot of Pagan attire right out there in plain sight. It is all in how you look at it.

When shopping for Pagan apparel and accessories, attitude and outlook are everything.

Shopping in regular clothing establishments can yield marvelous finds. A friend of mine once acquired a prom dress at the lingerie department in Sears. It was a beautiful, spaghetti-strapped, full-length black slip. Using her creative genius, shopping becomes an adventurous form of worship!

You can find mainstream clothing, such as broomstick skirts (those wonderfully pleated, elastic-waisted, ankle-length skirts that have become so fashionable), exotic scarves, and celestially patterned pieces of clothing almost anywhere. Mainstream clothing stores often carry a trendy line of accessories and clothing. Lingerie stores and pajama stores carry beautiful nightgowns, bathrobes, and caftans that adapt readily to ritual and other Pagan functions. Several popular lingerie catalogs carry clothing items such as corsets, bustiers, robes, and gowns that are remarkably adaptable to Pagan functions.

There are some popular themes emerging in t-shirts, such as Celtic iconography, Witches, and faces of European history and art. If you go to the mall, cruise its spiraling aisles with a watchful eye, and you will see an entire subculture right under your nose. Fabric stores offer yards and yards of wonderful fabrics that can be wrapped about the body as a sarong, sari, or toga without any sewing at

all. Asian and Indonesian markets/bazaars are treasure troves for clothing, as are stores catering to ethnic looks and martial arts. Secondhand stores, thrift stores, and vintage clothing stores are good choices.

Of course, it goes without saying that actual stores in shopping malls or plazas are not the only places to go shopping for clothes. Festivals and other Pagan gatherings are great places to acquire Pagan clothes. So is the Internet. Renaissance and historical clothiers have sites on the Net, as do Pagan tailors and seamstresses. Plug in the phrases *Renaissance clothing*, *Gothic clothing*, or *Pagan garb* into your browser and/or search engine. This could keep you busy for days!

Some of the more popular and mainstream clothing catalogs carry pieces of clothing that would serve a Pagan well at any event. I recommend Chadwick's, Lane Bryant, and Silhouettes. For larger women, there is an excellent company called Making it Big (www.makingitbigonline.com). You just have to look through them with a creative eye. The right "Pagan look" for you is out there somewhere. Remember: A lot of Pagans forego any sort of "look" and opt for basic jeans, sneakers, and t-shirts.

When looking for Pagan knickknacks, the mainstream stores in the mall have a lot to offer. Toy stores, nature stores, candle stores, craft gazebos, museum gift shops, garden shops, and hardware stores are all filled to the brim with items that can be Pagan-adapted. In the window of a local hardware store, I recently saw no fewer than three Pagan weather vanes: a voluptuous copper mermaid; an opulent sun, moon, and stars; and a starkly black iron Witch on a broomstick.

In the quiet little Illinois town where I grew up, I found two terra-cotta garden plaques: one of the Goddess in the

crescent moon with a field of five-pointed stars and a matching one of the God in the crescent moon on the same field of five-pointed stars. They were approximately \$13 each, and they are now part of my outdoor altar in my backyard. I have found the sun, moon, and stars patterns on things at a builder's warehouse!

The secondhand stores and thrift stores may yield real bargains, if you are just willing to hunt around. More obvious shopping paradises are the New Age shops, magical shops, herb markets, and occult shops. While you are in those Asian/Indonesian markets and bazaars, you will probably be overwhelmed by all the cool stuff.

Finally, Pagan festivals and gatherings are the obvious places to acquire what you are looking for. There are usually several clothing vendors, too many jewelry vendors to count, and a plethora of vendors selling plain old Pagan schtuff!

HELP! I'M BROKE!

Sometimes, the world can be all too mundane, and Pagans have to talk about and consider money. Pagans hate to talk about money, especially when it comes to spending their own hard-earned dollars. This is something that we really do share with almost everyone else.

Let's face it: We are consumers with other financial obligations, such as the mortgage, the rent, groceries, utility bills, car payments, and so forth. So, we have to consider the financial ramifications of what we are doing. I admit that being frugal has not always been my strong point; so, this next bit of advice comes from hard experience.

At times you can be indulgent, but do not be a spend-thrift. It is easy to go overboard and find yourself unable

to make the car payment because you just had to have that ritual sword.

Budget is not a dirty word. What you are meant to have, you will have. One summer, I was in Provincetown, Massachusetts. In that town, Commercial Street is a shopper's paradise, whether one is Pagan or not. I found a marvelous shop that dealt in nothing but gold jewelry. In it, I found a Goddess ring made of 14-karat gold. A moonstone was mounted between two faces of the Goddess. The ring was obviously an Art Deco reproduction. I fell in love with it, but it was just out of my price range that summer.

The following summer, I was back in Provincetown. I visited the same shop. The proprietor remembered me and called me by name. She said, "Dana! Have you come back for your ring? No one else ever even saw it or looked at it!" She pulled my Goddess ring out of the case, and the ring was still the same price. The difference was that I could afford it this time. Ever since this event, I have not doubted the wisdom of the Goddess when it comes to shopping.

There are people who will tell you that it is inappropriate to haggle over price—that is, if you find something that you must have, do not bargain. Just pay the price. I cannot ascribe to this, being a real haggler from way back. The magick of bargain-hunting is a special art all its own, and it can really pay off in the end. On the other hand, if you find something that is just too fabulous, chances are that someone else is also going to find it too fabulous. I cannot tell you how many times I have been at a science-fiction convention or a gathering and found the most incredible thing, but it was too expensive or I wanted to look some more or some other excuse. I would come back

to the table and it was gone! Remember: The fine art of procrastination also has its price.

If you have budgeted your money and if the purchase will not cost you the rent, your kids' new shoes, the car payment, and so forth, and if you find that thing that is just too fabulous, you would do well to acquire it. Chances are that after you have thought about it and after you come back on Sunday afternoon hoping to haggle over the price, it will be gone. This, too, has happened to me.

In the end, however, looking Pagan is not as important as being Pagan in your heart. One does not become Pagan just to wear cool clothes and jewelry. One becomes Pagan because this form of spirituality speaks to the heart and to the soul. There are plenty of Pagans whose spiritual views are the only adornments that they need. Sometimes, less is truly more.



CHAPTER 7

How Do I Learn This Pagan Stuff?

Paganism, as you have probably gathered, is very different from mainstream religions and spiritual traditions. There are no established churches or temples standing on street corners that you can go to. There are no scripted holy writs to consult. Sometimes, it is a struggle to find someone within the Pagan community who can offer true counseling or who can minister to the spirit in times of great need. So, you can forget your spoon; no one is going to spoon-feed this stuff to you.

Pagans tend to be very self-reliant: They seek their own answers and their own form of communion with The Great What Is. For people used to being spoon-fed the how, why, and wherefore of such things, Paganism can be either very mysterious or very intimidating, unless you know where to look.

READ, AND THE MAGICK IS WITH YOU

You have decided to educate yourself about Paganism. Now where do you begin? So many newcomers to

Paganism sat at Conversations With Pagans and said, *"Help! I don't know where to start!"* The obvious place to learn things is the old-fashioned way: Read a book.

Books about Paganism are everywhere these days. They can be found in public libraries. Go out and get a library card! Depending on where you live in the United States, the local library may carry quite a number of popular Pagan titles. If you cannot find anything obvious in the Dewey Decimal system under "Pagan," then check your library's sections on Religion, Philosophy, or Comparative Religion. Remember to check the sections on Ancient History, Archaeology, and Ancient Myths and Legends, too.

You can borrow books from friends, if they will part with them. The practical Pagan is a responsible book-borrower and returns books in the same condition and within a reasonable time frame. I have several books that keep getting lent out over and over again. I keep having to replace them over and over again.

However, as most Pagans do, you will ultimately realize that it is time to begin your own library, and this means purchasing your own books. To acquire books, I suggest that you begin with a bookstore, be it a mainstream book merchant, a secondhand bookstore dealing in used books, or a metaphysical/New Age bookstore. If you go into one of these places, there will be, literally, shelves and shelves of Pagan material. Even if you go to a mainstream bookseller, you will find shelves and shelves of Pagan material. This stuff is no longer reserved for Halloween or stuck in the Occult and Paranormal sections.

You might also stroll through the Religion section, the History section, and the Mythology section. You will find shelves and shelves of Pagan reading material. The practical

Pagan understands that Paganism began long before Gerald Gardner started writing in the 1950s and that most of the modern Pagan traditions have their roots in ancient belief systems. So, do not neglect the Philosophy, Ancient History, Archaeology, and Ancient Myths and Legends sections of the bookstore.

Finally, don't forget Web-based booksellers. These places are a gold mine. I've found almost every Pagan book I have ever wanted to read online. Not only could I find the titles I was looking for, but there were online book reviews that I could read immediately to see how other folks liked the book I was thinking about. Of course, some of the online booksellers are cheaper than bookstores, even with shipping and handling. This is very convenient, but ordering books late at night can be very addicting!

If you walk boldly into a place that carries several shelves' worth of Pagan reading material, you might become intimidated or discouraged. The volume of Pagan books has been steadily increasing over the years as the demand for this type of reading material has increased. It can be overwhelming. Sunday school and Hebrew school were easy: They told you what to read and how to pronounce it. Walk into a Buddhist temple, and you know what the holy men are going to look like. You know who to approach initially. At the same time of day every day, Moslems face Mecca and pray. This Pagan stuff, however, can really leave you with a headache.

Unless you already know that you are drawn to a particular path, such as Wicca, for example, the best place to start is with the basics—that is, with a look at the big picture.

Paganism is a big topic, but there are some very good books that overview the movement as a whole and that provide a general summation of what is going on. Where

do you find these books? How will you know which ones to read? Well, get some recommendations from your friends. Look at the recommended reading lists on the Web sites you have been perusing. Check with the other members of your e-mail lists, because they will have lots of recommendations for you. Check the book reviews for the online booksellers. Here are a few that I recommend:

- ❧ *The Well-Read Witch* by Carl McColman (New Page Books)
- ❧ *Phoenix from the Flame: Pagan Spirituality in the Western World* by Vivianne Crowley (Thorson's)
- ❧ *The Pagan Path* by Janet Farrar, Stewart Farrar, and Gavin Bone (Phoenix Publishing, Inc.)
- ❧ *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers and Other Pagans in America Today (Revised and Expanded Edition)* by Margot Adler (Penguin Group)
- ❧ *Paganism: An Introduction to Earth-Centered Religions* by River and Joyce Higginbotham (Llewellyn)

Not everyone is going to like the same books, but if you keep seeing the same titles show up over and over again, then chances are you have found something that you should probably read.

When reading any book, always look at the bibliographies and the reference sections. If the book you are reading does not particularly interest you, perhaps one of the books mentioned in the bibliography will catch your eye and provide you with what you are looking for. If the book that you are reading does interest you, check the sources that the author relied upon.

Reading is like a geometric progression. If I am reading a really good book, I find that I want to know more and will usually acquire some of the reference material mentioned in the book. Thus, my library is ever expanding. I am reading about two books in the kitchen, three in the living room, two in the bedroom, and a few in the study, even as I write this book! The practical Pagan's working library contains a wide range of material: history, theory, literature, anthropology, encyclopedias, and so on. The practical Pagan's book collection is an extremely valuable asset and resource. I check my books constantly. I read them more than once. Be comfortable with your books and be proud of them.

Certain Pagan authors are quite prolific. It can be difficult to decide which of their books you want to read first, or whether you want to read certain authors at all. If you are in a study group, or if you are part of a group that seems well informed, ask for opinions on what is good and what is not so good. If you are in a class or a seminar, ask for a recommended reading list, and if the teacher and/or moderator does not have one, then ask for some personal recommendations. Pagans are usually very eager to offer up what they have been reading or what they have found to be good reading in the past. Ask questions regarding specific authors. Remember that taste will differ from person to person. However, if some books come universally well recommended, chances are these books will be worth reading.

Don't worry if you read some stuff that you consider to be junk. Junk is everywhere. The practical Pagan knows the junk from the good stuff. You can pass this information along to someone else at the appropriate moment. In short, self-education is very important to the modern Pagan.

Reading will become a part of your everyday life. Over time, your taste and fancy in what you read will become quite diversified. As my mother used to say: “If you are genuinely interested in any one thing, it will eventually lead to an interest in everything.” For an example of how this geometric reading–magick works, consider this: I have never considered myself a math and science person. However, in order to figure out how magick works, I have found myself reading books on metaphysics. I am even reading books about the holographic universe. Amazing!

Other people’s interests will inspire you to read about what turns them on. I had a young student once who began with Wicca and then became enraptured with all things Japanese. I found myself reading about Shintoism just to keep up. Then, he began studying the Norse Runes with great discipline under the tutelage of another teacher. In order to be conversant with him, I had to go out and start reading about the Norse Runes. This sort of intellectual “spreading out” is a marvelous experience and one that Paganism encourages. Many people come to Paganism because they got tired of hearing, “Don’t question it. That is just the way it is.” For the practical Pagan, the learning process never stops. If there has been a productive relationship between a teacher and a student, the student should eventually wind up teaching the teacher quite a bit.

If you find a particular tradition that interests or inspires you, you will probably acquire a lot of books on the topic. In addition, you will acquire books on history, folklore, anthropology, archaeology, mythology, Fairy tales, and so forth. The resources upon which a Pagan draws for inspiration are limited only by the imagination of the Pagan. Eventually, you will crave encyclopedic

books on herbs and plants; gems, minerals, and crystals; symbols; incense and fragrances; cooking; and perhaps even sex. How-to books and manuals will creep into your library. I even find myself reading books that are considered “New Age.”

Nonfiction will not be the only source of reading material. There is a wealth of fiction that is Pagan-oriented and just plain old Pagan. Hollywood is starting to sit up and take notice. These things are fast being turned into made-for-TV mini-series and multimillion-dollar movies. Certain old favorites were fascinating before I publicly acknowledged my Paganism; now, they are like old friends. Some of these works of fiction have become the basis for modern Pagan traditions!

The practical Pagan understands that books, learning, and research are now a big part of life. Indulge and enjoy!

BEING TAKEN SERIOUSLY

Reading and scholarly pursuits are wonderful, but remember this: Reading a book, two books, or even three books, does not a priestess or a supreme magician make. Perhaps one of the biggest problems in the Pagan community is the notion that just about anyone can read a book or three and then declare him or herself a high-ranking such-and-such of the this-and-that order.

To be taken seriously, one has to be serious. Any person who takes his or her vocation or avocation seriously has devoted years of time, attention, study, experience, self-sacrifice, and work to it. The lack of these things shows rather easily in a magically and/or spiritually immature person who is masquerading as a person who has invested

the time and done the work required to *be* a High Priestess or a supreme magician. Generally speaking, the Pagan who declares him or herself to be some incredibly high-ranking official, after having done nothing more outstanding than having read a book or two, will not be looked upon favorably by most folks. Eventually, most folks will figure out that such a person has been faking it all along.

You really do not want to be the person who is faking it. This sort of behavior demonstrates a lack of maturity. It screams an overactive need to be validated; it is also indicative of a great need for attention, at almost any price—including one's honesty.

Certain covens require years of training and work before certain degrees are given out. I have heard of English covens that require 20 years of work before their degrees can be obtained. Some Druidic groves and Celtic organizations also require years of training and work before certain merits and titles are awarded out. In short, there are some people in the Pagan community who take their education and training very seriously.

Anyone who wants to give him or herself a title should realize that the title is worth exactly what you put into it. To have a serious title, a person should be willing to put in the work, the hours, and the self-sacrifice that the title merits, else it is just a hollow collection of words strung together at the end of a name.

DOING IS BEING

Academics are wonderful, but a course of scholarly study must be tempered with a course of experiential study as well. I would not want anyone to think that the only place to learn things Pagan is in a book or on a Web site.

How Do I Learn This Pagan Stuff?

Learning, in the Pagan world, also demands a certain amount of “spirits-on” work, if you will. The search for spiritual enlightenment can be very demanding, if one embarks on the search with intensity and seriousness.



After doing some reading, a student of mine came to me in exasperation and asked whether, in order to worship the Goddess, she had to have an altar, cleanse and consecrate everything, and do all the magickal things that were suggested in her reading. She told me that there just were not enough hours in the day for her to do all this work and live in the real world as well.

There is a distinction between spirituality and magick. Spirituality is what feeds and nurtures the soul. Your spiritual beliefs should offer you comfort and solace in times of need and pain. They should give you joy and a feeling of love and acceptance in the cosmos. They should afford you a look at The Big Picture with which you are comfortable. Your feelings of loneliness, fear, and isolation should diminish. That “dark place” in your heart should become more illuminated and become smaller.

You do not need a fancy altar with lots of stuff for this. This is as easy as a simple prayer offered to your deity of choice (or whoever/whatever else you think is listening) in bed at night after you have turned off the lights. My nightly prayer usually starts off something like this: “Mom, this is Dana. I need to talk to you.”

Of course, there are lots of people who adorn their spirituality with altars and lots of stuff. I will not lie. I am one of those people. Pagan stuff is exceedingly cool stuff. I have quite a bit of it. I love all of it.



However, my most profound spiritual experiences have been very unadorned. They have occurred in places where the Ancient Ones spoke to me: driving through the Rocky Mountains outside of Denver, at a glacier on the Kenai peninsula in Alaska, at low tide on the Cape Cod National Seashore, at a spring in southeastern Missouri, and in a vet’s office while my 18-year-old cat died in my arms.

There are deeply moving spiritual experiences hidden in the everyday aspects of life: the pleasure of a job well done, the love it takes to help someone who needs you,

and the ability to daydream. One has only to look at these things from a spiritual point of view—that is, to see these aspects of everyday life as rungs on the ladder of enlightenment. The only thing this requires is readjusting your focus: See with your heart of hearts instead of with your daily calendar or wristwatch. Reinvent the sense of wonder you had as a child, and view everything as an opportunity.

Some spiritual work can be quite involved and requires concentration and discipline.

Deep spiritual work at this level is very similar to magick, which is, as they say, a whole 'nother kettle o' fish. If you undertake a path of serious spiritual enlightenment or a path that is magickally intensive, be prepared for hard work.

BUT I WANT TO LEARN MAGIC!

At Conversations With Pagans, people came to me and said, “All that is well and good, but I want to learn magick!” What is magick? Veritable libraries have been written just on the definition of the word. Remember the conversation early in the book about the definition of the word *Paganism*? Defining *magick* can be just as difficult and just as controversial. However, I am a practical Pagan and, for me, the explanation I like best is this: Magick is the fine art and science of achieving your goal. Magick is a simple formula, really. It is the energy applied to accomplish an objective. Seen in this light, the discipline of the athlete, the talent and expertise of the artist, and the knowledge of the scholar are all somewhat magickal.

I also refer to magick as a form of language. There are, perhaps, thousands of languages in the world. All these languages are the means by which a certain group of people expresses certain universal ideas, concepts, notions, and

questions, such as: How much does it cost?; Where is the bathroom?; I love you; How do I get there?; Are we there yet?; and When are we going to eat?

Similarly, there are probably hundreds of different magickal methodologies, which are all formulas for achieving the same things: wealth, health, love, security, and safety in an ever-changing and uncertain world. Akin to the linguist who learns his language well, magical methodologies must be learned well in order to be effective.

I CAN'T LEARN THIS ALL BY MYSELF!

How does one learn? Where does one go to learn? If one is going to practice magick or any of the magickal disciplines, certain baseline skills and practical skills must be learned. They can be learned by a person who works alone as a solitary or solitaire. These skills can be learned in a class or seminar surrounding. They can be learned at public rituals and other public events. They can be learned one on one with an individual teacher and student.

Some people believe that the learning process, whether it involves spiritual enlightenment or magick, involves only reading dusty books or participating in weekend-long seminars that cost hundreds of dollars. This is not necessarily the case. The practical Pagan knows that reading and study should be balanced with an equal dose of experience. You do not have to empty your wallet to do this, but you can if you want to. The choice is entirely yours.

LEARNING EXPERIENTIALLY AS A SOLITAIRE

To learn any basic skill of a particular discipline all alone is the hardest work that I can think of. This is particularly

true when dealing with magick. To teach yourself a magickal methodology requires focus, concentration, and discipline. It is not easy to play hooky from a class where 15 or 20 other people you know are depending on you. It is ridiculously easy to blow off your Sunday night one-hour session with yourself in favor of some *Star Trek* rerun. So, first and foremost, solitary study involves discipline and the willingness to go through with the commitment you have made to yourself. It is pretty hard to fall asleep in class while you are working with a partner in creating and passing energy balls between one another. The seemingly impossible can occur. I had a very devoted class comprised of a group of hardworking adults, and over nearly two years, almost everyone in the class found a way to use it for a brief nap.

It is easy to delude yourself that you have even created such a thing while you are about to snooze off in the privacy of your bedroom. To do solitary work you must stay awake. It is tough to exist in some daydream when a tough-as-nails priest or teacher is firing up your chakras. It requires no effort at all to spend your hour perusing the dust bunnies behind the door of your kitchen. Solitary work requires focus.

As a solitary, where do you start? There is a lot to be gained by doing the practical work suggested and outlined in most of the Pagan literature. I would like to point out that in many of the Pagan books, there are exercises that one can do that will assist you in breathing, in visualization, in trance, in relaxing, and so forth. Such exercises are not put in these books just so that you can gloss over them.

My recommendation is to read the entire book first so that you get an idea of the author's ideas and theories. Then, go back through the book and do the exercises page by page. At first, you may fall asleep. They can be very

relaxing, and for the undisciplined person, they provide a great challenge. Most of us are trained to believe that being relaxed has one purpose: It is the prelude to sleep, and, once relaxed, we are conditioned to fall asleep. We are not used to thinking of a relaxed and intuitive/meditative state as being important and as being a place for serious and helpful work. It takes a little time to overcome this preconditioning. Hang in there.

For the actual doing of psychic or energetic exercises, a partner can be invaluable. If you cannot find a partner or if you do not have one, then you are stuck with learning self-discipline. Do not feel bad because you snooze off when you first attempt these things. A lot of us did just that. Keep on trying. Self-discipline may be just the thing the Universe is trying to teach you at the moment. Remember this: Many Pagans out there literally pulled themselves up by their bootstraps. They read books. They simply did the exercises that were contained in the books they read. They acquired audiotapes and videotapes and then did the work on their own.

Whether at the outset of their Pagan learning program, or at some other place in their development, most Pagans usually undertake some form of solitary work. Wanting to work and learn on your own does not make you weird or un-Pagan. Nothing could be further from the truth! At this point, these intrepid self-teachers forego working in groups and prefer to work one on one with the deities, the mighties, the spirits, guardians, elementals, or energies of their choice.

LEARNING EXPERIENTIALLY IN GROUPS

Then again, at some point, many Pagans get the urge to work with people. I have known very few Pagans who

were truly content to go it alone for always. These folks are out there. I just have not met too many of them. For the people who just get incredibly curious, there comes a time when solitary work, no matter how gratifying or glorious, simply is not enough. They become curious. They want to know what else is going on. They want to know how others are doing it, whatever “it” is. They venture out of their solitary workings and courses of study to see how “it” is going with their brothers and sisters.

Does this make them mere herd animals and mindless followers seeking some charismatic Svengali to spoon-feed them? No, not in all cases. Both learning paths (that of the solitary practitioner and that of the group participant) have equal merit and value. The practical Pagan will probably walk down both paths during her or his Pagan experience.

Where and how do you find groups to work with and learn with? Remember the courses and seminars mentioned in Chapter 5 on networking? This is where a lot of Pagans go when they feel the need to break from solitary working. Not only were those previously mentioned courses and seminars great places for meeting people, they were also great places for actually learning something.

If you find a good teacher, take several classes with that teacher and get to know him or her. Teachers provide wisdom not only by conducting class, but also in how they live their lives. There are times, however, when a teacher can teach a great class, but his or her own life might not be exactly textbook. Does this make him or her a bad teacher? Not necessarily. There is wisdom, at times, in the old adage “do as I say, not as I do.” As a teacher myself, I often find that I would do well to heed my own advice. I look at my best friends, who are also Witches and ministers, and say: “This is the part where I tell you that I can talk until I

am blue in the face, but I am not capable of doing it all the time, okay?” Teachers are just people, after all.

Of course, the age-old problems are: Who is a good teacher, and how do you find one?

Sometimes, the choice of teachers is not that extensive. You may find only two or three people openly teaching at all in places such as a bookshop, conference center, or a Pagan hangout. Even if there is only one person teaching a Pagan topic which you would like to cover, check into his or her background, credentials, and references. If the person's course is being offered at a particular place, check to see if there is some sort of class outline, course description, or reading list available for you to look at. Check to see if there is anyone else taking the class. Check to see if anyone else took the class previously. Try to find out how they would rate it or whether they would recommend it to you.

If the teacher has left a bio (curriculum vitae and/or resume) of him or herself, read it. Does this person sound literate and articulate? A book list, a bio, and a class outline are evidence of an organized and prepared teacher who has put some advance planning into what he or she is teaching. A teacher who does not prepare a class outline or course description, who does not have a book list, who does not have a sign-up sheet, or who does not have a bio available simply does not sound organized or prepared. This is not to say that the course might not be fantastic, even if he or she is flying by the seat of his or her broom. However, these are clues and hints as to what you, the would-be student, might reasonably expect when you get into the class.

Once in the class, you should feel comfortable with the teacher. The teacher should strive to make all of the

students comfortable with one another. There should be a measure of emotional security that is established in the group. Please remember this: A class is not just about a good teacher. A class is also about good students: people who participate, people who have enthusiasm and a willingness to do the things expected of them, and people who are willing to work together. As someone who has taught more than a few classes on Wicca and Witchcraft, I generally expect that persons taking a class have a genuine interest in learning what I am teaching—that is, they have not come to the class specifically to be disruptive, to make trouble, to be lazy, or to be a pain in the pants. Most teachers expect that their would-be students are there because they have a genuine interest in the course curriculum and are really willing to learn, even if it is only for the sake of knowing anything about something they have no real knowledge about. I have taught more than one or two people about Witchcraft who were not Witches, who were not trying to be Witches, and who still are not Witches. They were there just to learn technique, background, and perspective. That these folks stayed in class was a great compliment to me and to the tradition I tried to teach. However, they were earnest and hard working, things that I, as a teacher, greatly appreciated.

Once in class, you should be committed to doing the work, attending class, and finishing the class, even if it meets several times. There is a special thing called “the group dynamic.” A group that works and studies together acquires its own special energy or vibration. Such a group of people shares a common experience, spoken and unspoken, seen and unseen, felt and known. I call this the group dynamic. It is the special energy recipe that takes a group from a bunch of random ingredients to a really

great magickal cheesecake. Remove any one ingredient after they have all been combined, and the cheesecake will not taste right. Having gotten into the group, understand that you have made a commitment to the group. That commitment means that unless you have a really great reason for quitting, you stick it out to the end. Almost nothing is more frustrating to a group of hardworking students who are working on a great magickal cheesecake than to find out that one of the essential ingredients has taken a hike.

Keep a notebook so that you can take notes. Keep the handouts. Keep the book lists. Keep the address and phone lists of your fellow students. You will need all these things at a later date. Keep a record of whose class you took when and when you finished it. Someone may ask you what you know about such-and-such someday, and it is very gratifying to say that on such-and-such a date in time, you finished a 25-hour course in the basics of a tradition.

LEARNING AS THE PAMPERED, PRIVATE STUDENT OF A TEACHER

Sometimes, learning things Pagan in a formal class or seminar surrounding is not what the Pagan seeker has in mind. Then what? Sometimes the seeker looks for a private teacher, someone to teach them one-on-one about Things Pagan. The big throated questions often heard in Pagan circles are: Where are these people, and how do I pick a good one?

Finding someone willing to take on “private students” is a big challenge. Such a teacher is probably busier than a one-broom Witch with a two-broom job. These folks probably have jobs, families, their own covens, their own

spirituality, and their own wands in the fire, so to speak. Their time is probably very limited; so, do not take responses of “I’m sorry, but I just do not have the time” too personally. However, this begs the question: Where do you find them?

The person teaching the class or seminar that was good should probably be approached and asked if he or she teaches privately. The person leading the public ritual that you found so inspiring should probably be approached and asked if he or she teaches privately. The author of the article in the local journal that you recently read and found so insightful should probably be approached and asked if he or she teaches privately. You might find someone local listed on a big Web site such as The Witches’ Voice (www.witchvox.com), and you can contact him or her by phone or e-mail.

As a courtesy to the person who just taught a seminar or who just facilitated ritual, do not ask this person immediately afterward if he or she will take you on as a private student. This poor person is bushed, having just taught another class or having done another presentation. Get his or her phone number and/or e-mail address and ask later, when he or she will be thinking more clearly.

Do some background work on whoever you are thinking of approaching so that you have some idea of what his or her reputation and character are. Consider some of the following guidelines; ask around regarding this person’s reputation and preparedness in teaching private students. How disciplined is the approach? Or is it haphazard? Have any of this person’s students gone on to teach themselves, become active in the Pagan community, or formed their own groups and/or covens? A truly good teacher will inspire his or her students. If you can find any of the students

taught privately by the person you seek, talk to these students frankly. What did they learn? How were they taught? What was the teacher like? Does this teacher have a reputation of following through with students? Is this teacher known for his or her character, or is he or she notorious or infamous for some unsavory reason?

Remember that opinions differ and, sometimes, there can be some genuine animosity within a community or among individuals. If you get widely divergent opinions, chances are that this teacher has a strong personality, strong opinions, and a distinctive teaching style. Such a person will be either very much liked or very much disliked. If you get consistently good opinions, then you need to contact this person right away and get a place in line.

Sometimes you may not be able to track down anyone who has a history with your would-be teacher. Students have become apprenticed to a teacher without knowing very much about him or her.

Once in a situation, how do you know that you are in a good situation? First, you feel comfortable, safe, and secure. There is a level of trust and confidentiality that puts you at ease. The teacher should spend some time talking to you about you but should not be demanding intimate details of your life; neither should the teacher be spending time-sharing intimate details of his or her life. Such things may become somewhat necessary at a more advanced level of work, but not in the beginning. Second, the teacher should outline the course of study and should make you aware of what you will be doing, how you will be doing it, and the timetable involved in doing it. Third, the teacher should have a plan for imparting and sharing the knowledge. That is, there should be a book list with time allotted to discuss the reading and time allotted for “spirits-on”

training. Fourth, the teacher and the student should have somewhat compatible personalities; they should get along and be able to talk to one another candidly and freely without hurting or insulting one another. Fifth, there should be no violence, pressure, or sex involved. Although consenting adults are consenting adults, any teacher who demands sex in return for teaching is dangerous. Get out of there immediately. Anyone who would injure you physically, emotionally, or energetically is also dangerous. Get out of there immediately. Sixth, the teacher should keep commitments and should be flexible with your schedule and with his or her schedule. Seventh, there should be a progression as the teaching goes on. New material should be covered as time wears on, and the teacher should encourage the student to study and to learn on his or her own apart from the teacher/student relationship. For example, one of my private students became very interested in Shintoism. In order to keep up, I began reading books on Shintoism. It has been a very interesting learning experience. Finally, a teacher should have certain personal qualities. He or she should be gracious and have a healthy sense of self-esteem. A good teacher should be able to admit weaknesses and to admit when he or she is just plain old incorrect about something. A good teacher has some measure of humility and looks on the opportunity to teach at all with gratitude. To have minds willing to receive what a teacher provides is a great privilege, and the teacher should behave accordingly. A good teacher does not go about imposing his or her own brand of prejudice or misogyny on students.

My experiences with my first private student and with my classes taught me this: A good teacher is able to learn from his or her students. A teacher's mind and psyche are

open and available to more advanced learning, even if it means coming from a newbie. I have often said that I do not know who learns the most in a teacher/student relationship: the students or me. In my experience, teaching and learning have really been a two-way street, for which I am most grateful.

The search for a good teacher can be one of the most frustrating quests that a Pagan goes on. A lot of Pagans never find one. If you are looking, do not think that a good one is going to fall off some tree and just land in your lap. Then again, maybe one will. Continue your program of self-education and of learning from others and from the world around you.

If a teacher is willing to teach you privately, rest assured that you have just found something that most Pagan seekers would give their crystals for. You, as the student, have responsibilities and duties as well. It is your job to do the work that the teacher assigns: to do the reading; to do the exercises; to write the essays, the spells, and the journals; and to do the assigned homework. It is your job to turn up on time. If you have to cancel, please have the courtesy to call your teacher well in advance and advise him or her that you have to cancel. You better have a mighty fine reason for canceling. The teacher has made time in what is, assuredly, a very busy schedule for you. Juggling a schedule is not easy, and teachers do not appreciate cancellations for trivial things. If you are going to be more than half an hour late for a session, then call and advise your teacher of this. Show up awake, nourished, rested, bathed, clean, and prepared. People don't learn anything if their stomach is growling, if they had two hours of sleep the night before, or if they smell like a goat.

PAYING FOR IT

Should Pagan teachers require or take payment from their students? Should High Priestesses and High Priests ask for payment when they create and perform something such as a rite of passage? Should the apprentice to a coven pay for being there? Should the private student pay for what the teacher is imparting? These are highly volatile and vehemently debated questions in the Pagan community. Frankly, I do not know if there is one single answer for all these questions. So, what about Pagans and money?

First of all, you are going to pay money for books, clothes, and other Pagan stuff that you purchase in mainstream stores, from catalogs, and from Web sites. Generally speaking, if you are looking to acquire anything from a Pagan vendor at a festival or gathering, you are going to pay money for it. If you are very lucky, you might be able to barter, trade, or exchange for it.

Eclectic Pagan artisans are trying to make a living, too. You will usually pay money for their creations, their wares, and their goods.

Second, if you take a class that is offered at a bookstore, a conference center, or some other place besides a private residence, you are probably going to be paying for the class. Why?

The proprietor who owns the premises is not in business to lose money. Although it is an opportunity to have a number of people in his establishment and hopefully buying things, it is still a rental of space that the proprietor makes to the teacher or group. The proprietor usually expects to be paid for the use of his space. Thus, the person running the class or seminar must charge money, because a percentage of it goes to the proprietor.

For example, for years I taught a multilevel class in Wicca, magick, and ritual. The classes usually had anywhere from nine to 24 people in them. Each class session was four hours long. There were usually four to five class sessions per tier of the class. I spent at least six hours in class preparation before each class. The proprietor of the store where these classes were held wanted a percentage of the money I took in. This was a reasonable request; we were using big blocks of time involving his space. I expected to be paid. I did not think that this was unreasonable. I was working my wand off!

I have taught several sessions of my Wicca classes at my home. I charged money. I was working my wand off, and I had about 25 people using my electricity and my bathroom, consuming my water, and generally hanging out twice a month. Charging money did not seem unreasonable or unethical to me.

The teacher who teaches privately presents another situation all together. In this situation, we usually do not have big groups of people meeting for endless hours at a time. The teacher and the student meet when their schedules converge, usually for one or two hours at a time. Okay, so I am different: I required my private students to give up four-hour time blocks on the weekends. I was a strict teacher. What can I say? For this service, however, I did not charge money. I used a rather old-fashioned route: I asked for a service in return. This is the age-old barter system. It worked like this: One student cared and tended for my yard; another did household chores for me; another helped me with shopping and cooking; another did some sewing for me, and so forth. This seemed fair and reasonable to me.

I understand that there are private teachers out there who seek nothing in return; I understand that there are

private teachers out there who charge money for these sessions. Everything depends on the circumstances and the individuals involved. Do not be shocked or stupefied if a private teacher brings up the notion of “tit for tat.” It has been going on for a very long time.

The coven that takes on a potential new member probably is not going to charge the potential new member money. Why is this? A coven is a spiritual observance group. It is somewhat akin to the parish of the local church. Although the local church probably does require a weekly tithe in order to pay the minister, pay for the taxes, upkeep on the church, and so on, the small working coven usually does not have these concerns. What they probably will require, however, is that you bring food and drink to meetings and to Sabbat observances, just as everyone else does.

What about Pagan clergy folk who perform weddings, various rites of passage, and so on? The notion of a paid Pagan clergy is one of those hotly debated issues, so what you can expect here varies widely. Most mainstream clergy are paid for what they do. You pay a mainstream cleric a fee to marry you. Why should this be any different for the Pagan folk?

Some Pagan clergy ask to be paid; others ask only for their expenses to be reimbursed; and some ask for a donation to be made to a favorite charity. Once, I asked some folks to make a \$25 donation in the name of Strider to the local Humane Society. Strider was my beloved friend and familiar who passed into the arms of Bast several years ago.

If you go to a professional tarot reader or dream interpreter, you are going to pay a fee. I know several Pagans who earn vital extra cash by reading cards and performing divination. The notion of the Witch who performs spells

for a price is not new. Unfortunately, Fairy tales tell us that the price asked by the Witch was usually pretty steep: For example, Ariel, from *The Little Mermaid*, gave up her voice. Some modern magick-users do perform spells for money. Some advertise that they perform spells for money. This is work. This is a service. If you cannot bring yourself to pay for what is offered, then you may do it yourself. It's as simple as that.

REMEMBER THAT LEARNING COMES FROM MANY PLACES

Pagans love to discuss their personal experiences. Such conversations can become very effective teaching modalities. This was the working principle behind *Conversations With Pagans*. So when partaking of the time-honored Pagan tradition of shooting the breeze at a coffeehouse, the practical Pagan listens to what everyone else is saying. The practical Pagan asks questions and contributes to the conversation. These exchanges can provide a wellspring of education. Pay attention to the experiences of others, both good and bad. Do not be intimidated by those who appear to be more experienced than you. Chances are, the other more experienced folk will welcome your questions, comments, and input. Learning from one another is one of the great joys of Paganism.

Try not to appear or sound judgmental. Pagans are very sensitive to the thought of being “judged.” To many Pagans, judgmental attitudes are very reminiscent of the religious traditions they are trying so desperately to escape. It is the spiritual enlightenment or knowledge found on the mountain that counts, and as one very wise elder I know once said, “There are many paths up that mountain.”

How Do I Learn This Pagan Stuff?

Attend public rituals and magickal workings. Believe it or not, there are many communities in the country where Pagans are performing public work; it is happening in parks, art galleries, at Earth Day celebrations, and in various nooks and crannies of the mundane world.



You will soon get a feel for what you like and what you don't like, for what works and what does not work, for what gave you the big energetic buzz and what did not. If you are keeping a notebook, journal, or Book of Shadows, jot down these things so that you remember them.

Incorporate them into your own solitary work. Remember to be flexible and to think things through.

Finally, there is no substitute for getting out and experiencing things on your own. I strongly recommend that you take some time every day to pray and/or to commune with those divine entities, beings, or energies that you have a strong attraction to or affinity for. I pray to Isis every day. She is my patron Goddess, and I have formed a special relationship with her over the years. Once, in a time of great need, I called upon the Goddess for help. Isis is

the goddess who answered me, and I have been in Her service ever since. For most Pagans who seek a special connection with Deity, a deity or a pantheon of deities eventually is revealed. Even if a Pagan has no special connection to Deity, it is not a difficult thing to take a little time each day to honor the world in which we live. It might be as simple as turning my face to the warm sunshine and letting myself enjoy its warmth and light all over my body without feeling any guilt in having taken five or 10 minutes out of my day to do so.

TAKING THE TIME TO LEARN FROM YOURSELF

Believe it or not, you are a great teacher. You teach yourself important things every day. Learning about things Pagan is no different. The key here is to actually take the time. It is the key to most journeys of self awareness and self discovery. One must actually create the time to do these things. One must invent the time, make the time, and/or steal the time to be relaxed, to be meditative, to be introspective, to be intuitive, to be contemplative, and to just be. For some folks, this is frightening. For others, it is the big excuse they have always needed to tell people: “Buzz off! I need some alone time!”

What you need here is to be left alone in a quiet space with no interruptions. I know that this is more difficult than it sounds, but it can be accomplished. Here are some suggestions. Put some time into your schedule to do this. Then, take the phone off the hook (the phone is my great nemesis) and lock the front door. Put a sign on the front door that says *Go Away!* Sit alone by yourself in some quiet place, such as your room. Shut the door and lock it, if you must.

Odd as it may sound, most people, when finally in this perfect situation, experience panic. Some people feel great guilt. Some people go to sleep. Some people feel a great sense of relief, and then they go to sleep. If you can manage to chase away the anxiety and the drowsiness, what do you do?

Stay awake and just sit with yourself. Close your eyes and let yourself drift. You are about to undergo a very strange but enlightening experience. At first, most people hear the chatter and babble of their everyday lives. This can be very distracting. This sort of inner talk sounds similar to this: *I have to go do the marketing when this is over. I hope I took the chicken out of the freezer to thaw. Tomorrow, I have to call the plumber.* Just let this mundane talk spin itself out. You will get tired of it. The pieces of what you hear will make less and less sense as the moments tick by.

Then, you will probably hear the underlying psychochatter that exists just beneath your everyday noise. This is the thick and gooey stuff that clings to our psyches like an oil spill. (This is just about how useful it is, too.) Psychochatter might sound like this: *I am fat. I am ugly. No one loves me. No one ever loved me. No one is ever going to love me. I am alone. I will always be alone because I am fat and ugly. All I ever wanted was for someone to love me. Why am I living? No one is ever going to love me because I am fat and ugly.*

This is obviously some very damaging and destructive stuff. Some people cannot get past their psychochatter. When they come upon it, it frightens them so badly that they go out and do the marketing. They get busy with their mundane lives so that they can blot out the psychochatter.

Some people get very mired in it. They wallow in it. They become depressed.

They stop the introspective work that they are doing, and then they go out and do some self-destructive thing that enforces the psychochatter, such as commit hari kari with a credit card or a chocolate cheesecake.

If I sound as if I have firsthand experience with this stuff, it is because I do. You are reading my psychochatter. I found my psychochatter underneath my everyday noise and realized that this poisonous stuff was fueling my almost-desperate desire to not be alone with myself. It is very difficult to explore one's spirituality without the ability to be alone with oneself. Periodically, I explore my psychochatter and try to be honest with it, to clean it out. As with any closet where skeletons are stored, that place in my psyche that houses my psychochatter does not stay clean and tidy for very long, and it requires periodic cleaning.

How does one get past the psychochatter? Although there are several methods, the easiest is to just let the psychochatter flow by, as you did the everyday noise. Look at it the same way you did the everyday noise. It is a part of our psyche, and you can think of it a river: It has its own current, its own ebb and flow. Let it flow by. Don't get lost in every twig or leaf that this particular river brings you. Just let it keep flowing by. Eventually, it stops being such a rushing and gushing current. It becomes a lazy stream and, eventually, it dries up all together. Having gotten past all this, where are you? Probably in a state of stillness you have not been in for who knows how long. Just sit and experience it. Breathe with it. Roll around in it. Enjoy it. Allow yourself total consumption by it. Just give in.

While in this state, people have all sorts of experiences. Students of mine have said that they see things, hear things,

and experience either full-scale waking visions or bits and pieces that appear to be something dreamlike. Let yourself exist in this state for as long as you would like to be there. When you have had enough, breathe deeply and count backwards from 10 very slowly. This will bring you back up through the levels of consciousness that you have been floating around in. When you get to one, slowly open your eyes and just sit for a moment or two. Focus your eyes and attention on something. Wait until everything becomes clear again. Then you should probably journal (write down) what has just occurred and try to record as much as you can remember.

When you first come around after having been in these deeply contemplative states of mind, things may actually look blurry and unclear. Let your eyes and everyday mind focus.

Move around slowly. Get a glass of water. People dehydrate while doing this kind of work. Drink the water and then write in your journal. Nothing is inconsequential. Even your psychochatter and how you dealt with it has meaning.

Some people meet their spirit guides this way. Some people have visions of the future.

Some people are able to commune with their gods and goddesses in this fashion. All sorts of amazing things can happen. You are on your way to a deeply rewarding and richly textured magickal experience! Really, it was as simple as taking a half hour to 45 minutes out of your day and permitting yourself to have the experience. Congratulations! Now you are learning something!

There are a wealth of books, tapes, and videos out that you could turn to for more help in experiencing the wisdom of the Universe. Practitioners of modern self-help

who are noteworthy include Dr. Carolyn Myss, Deepak Choprah, Anodea Judith, Donna Eden, Barbara Ann Brennan, and Louise L. Hay. This book is not about that, but hopefully, you are now on your way to receiving the messages you need to receive from your journey. Carry on!



CHAPTER 8

How Do I “Come Out” As a Pagan?

Somewhere along the line, you realized that you are not like a lot of people that you know. The mainstream religions are just not doing it for you. You find more spiritual inspiration in a blade of grass than at last year’s Easter service in the church down the street. Things keep happening to you that you cannot explain. You feel pulled in a certain direction, and so you have gone there.

You have found books that speak your language. You have met people that you can relate to, who are a lot like yourself, who sound like you, believe like you, and who are having the sorts of experiences that you would like to have and are, in fact, having. You have gone in search of these experiences and are actively seeking both the experiences and the people out. You know for certain what you are not, and you are beginning to get a pretty clear picture of what you are. You know that you are different from a lot of the people in your life. You love them, but you are different. You revel in and love what you are. You would like to share this with the folks in your life, but you are just slightly anxiety ridden over this. What are you going to do?

SHOULD I REVEAL MYSELF TO THOSE WHO ARE IMPORTANT TO ME?

In Pagan circles, whether you identify yourself as a Witch or not, this syndrome is commonly referred to as “coming out of the broom closet.” The question usually is: *How do I reveal my spiritual beliefs and, afterward, find acceptance or maybe just tolerance?* As with most things Pagan, this depends on the circumstances and the personalities involved. There is no established formula or set pattern for how and when to make the announcement to your mother, your significant other, your boss, your best friend, and so on that you are Pagan. As a practical Pagan, you are going to have to use your common sense to make the decision about whether you want to do it, how you do it, and to whom should you do it.

There are some important decisions to be made here, and they are not decisions to be made lightly. As we have seen earlier, they could have some significant ramifications in your life.

DO YOU REALLY WANT TO COME OUT OF THE BROOM CLOSET?

Some Pagan folk claim that they never feel the need to share their beliefs with anyone.

They hold their spiritual beliefs close to their hearts and never reveal them. Some Pagan folk say they never share their beliefs with anyone because they are genuinely afraid to do so. Some Pagan folk have selectively shared their beliefs with just a chosen few: their best friends, their significant others, and so forth. Perhaps these people attend a few events or go to a few seminars, but they really

do prefer that their privacy be maintained. Some Pagan folk are just “out there” all the time: They have made a public declaration about their beliefs from which there is no return. Their families know, their bosses know, the media knows. Everyone knows.

I used to try to hide what I was. I did not do a very good job, because most people who knew me knew that I was a Pagan woman. One day, a friend of mine referred a reporter to me at Christmastime for a newspaper article describing how Pagans feel about Christmas and whether Pagans feel disenfranchised at Christmas. So there I was at the Yule season with a journalist on the phone, and he wanted to interview me for this article. Although I had been thinking about revealing myself for a while, I was still on the fence about it. Suddenly the decision was simply there in my lap. I ran a quick, internal, on-the-spot soul search, and I went for it. I was a lawyer with a very good law firm. I figured that I could handle myself if there were any serious repercussions. Were there any repercussions? Well, there were one or two, but nothing that I was incapable of handling. For the most part, it has been pretty smooth cauldron-stirring ever since.¹⁴

If you have not “come out” to anyone, you need to ask yourself if you really want to share this part of yourself and why this sharing would be important to you. In some cases, the decision of whether to reveal yourself as a Pagan will literally read similar to a cost/benefit analysis: *If I come out, what will be the cost to me and what will be the benefit to me? Will the benefits outweigh the costs such that I am comfortable in making my spiritual beliefs known?*

For some Pagans struggling with these issues, their internal conversation might sound similar to this: *I am unhappy hiding this vital part of myself. I want to be able to*

have an altar in my room. I am tired of hiding my books. I am tired of praying to my gods in silence and in secret. I want to be open about my spirituality because being secretive about it is wrong, and I am not happy being secretive about it. But if I reveal this, will I lose my job? Will my parents throw me out of the house? Will my relatives harass me every chance they get? Will my parents feel as if they have to pray for my soul? Will I lose my inheritance? Will my family cut me off without a cent? Will my significant other rethink our relationship and possibly want to end it? Will I lose my children in a custody battle if I reveal myself as a Pagan? Will anyone close to me suffer bad consequences as a result of my personal, spiritual choice?

These are terribly painful and personal issues to be wrestling with. We have already looked at some of the very real and very legal ramifications of revealing yourself. By now it should be clear that no one can tell you how you should respond to these questions. No one can answer these questions for you; you have to answer them for yourself. Do not allow yourself to be harassed, pressured, or boxed into a corner by anyone on these issues. Do not allow yourself to be harassed, pressured, or boxed into a corner at all. You are the one who will ultimately live with the consequences of your actions. This choice is yours. Choose wisely.

IF I REVEAL MYSELF, WHAT CAN I EXPECT?

Pagans often ask how non-Pagans will react. The responses you are going to get will vary widely because people vary widely. Often, I am surprised by the nonchalance with which my pentacle is received. Only rarely has my pentacle inspired the “you are going to hell” monologue. Most often I hear, “How fascinating. Can you tell me about it?”

It is very difficult, if not impossible, for anyone to tell you how your family is going to react. You are the one who knows your family. You know best how they are going to react. It is almost impossible for anyone to tell you how your boss is going to react. You are the one who works for your boss, and you are going to know best what to expect. It is impossible for anyone other than you to determine how your friends and intimate associates are going to react. You know them best. You are the best judge of the expected response.

Much of the time, people go way out in left field when confronted with news of this sort. They do and say completely unexpected things when smacked with an announcement such as this. There are no precise formulas. We are dealing with people, after all. The practical Pagan must look at these various situations, however, and apply a ration of caution when deciding whether to come out or not.

Coming out at home

Probably the most emotionally laden issue is whether a Pagan should reveal her- or himself to family. Many Pagans have asked me, *“Will my parents throw me out of the house?”*

If you are in your 30s and still living at home, this could actually be a good thing, as most adults should be occupying their own space anyway, unless there are special circumstances, such as if you are taking care of invalid parents. If you are under the age of 18 and/or are still in high school, this poses a very delicate situation. If you are an emancipated adult living on your own or with other people, what could this mean?

Until persons under the age of majority reach legal adulthood, they are the legal responsibility of their parents. The

legal age of majority for certain things can vary widely within a state. For example you must be 18 to vote, but you can get a work permit at the age of 14, get a driver's license at age 16, can't drink until you are 21, and can join the military at age 18. Among the states, there can be discrepancies about the age at which it is legal to do certain things. For example, to marry without parental consent in Mississippi, a boy can be 17, but a girl can be 15. In Missouri, both parties must be 18 to marry without parental consent. (For an online table showing a breakdown of the age of consent for marriage by state, go to www.law.cornell.edu/topics/table_marriage.htm.) Again, if you have a desire to do legal research in this area, you may consult your state statutes in the law library at the courthouse in your county seat, or you may do a surprising amount of research online at www.law.cornell.edu/topics/state_statutes.html.

While a person is a minor, the law reposes in the parents certain rights. Among those rights is the right of the parent to inculcate the child with values, beliefs, and morals that, according to the parent, are appropriate. In short, under the law, the spiritual education of children is part and parcel of the parental rights that the legal system affords the parents.¹⁵ Interference with these rights by another adult or by a group or organization could possibly lead to a lawsuit, depending on how zealous or lawsuit-happy the parents are.

If you are a minor and you cannot find an adult coven or adult teacher to teach you, this is probably the reason. If you are a minor and you cannot get into a class or Pagan event without a parental waiver or consent form, this is probably the reason.

So, if you are a minor, if your parents are zealous in their particular belief system, and if your parents have been zealous in trying to teach you these same belief systems, the announcement of your Pagan beliefs is going to cause a major disturbance. Will they actually throw you out of the house? If you have an older brother or sister who was thrown out of the house for some offense before reaching the age of majority, chances are that your parents are capable of doing this. You might wish to wait until you graduate from high school, move out of the house, or go on to college before revealing your Pagan beliefs.

If your parents have not been particularly zealous in trying to impose a certain religious tradition on you, then ask yourself honestly: *How open minded are my parents? Can I talk to them frankly and candidly? If they ask me tough questions, can I respond to these questions calmly, rationally, and articulately? Can I give them a good book or two to read? Can I refer them to a good article to read? Would they go to a spiritual observance with me? Am I pursuing this spiritual path because I genuinely believe in it and because it offers nourishment to my soul, or am I pursuing this spiritual path because I want to be different, because I want attention, because I want to wear cool jewelry, because I want to claim to be a priestess or a Witch, or because I want to shock somebody? Am I doing this just because I want to tick off my parents?*

Obviously, these last questions present no legitimate reason for professing any system of religious beliefs. If these are your reasons for being Pagan or for expressing your Paganism to your parents, then you can expect to be met with as much sincerity as you have dished out.

Crystal Seifferly (the same young woman who was the plaintiff in the Michigan court case involving her right to

wear her pentacle as a symbol of her faith at school) was in her young teens when she discovered Wicca. After studying it carefully for a year, she approached her parents and told them that this was the spiritual path she had chosen. She and her parents had a sane and rational conversation about Wicca. Crystal gave her parents books to read, and her parents eventually gave her their blessing. Crystal's course of religious study did not interfere with her schoolwork. She was an honor student to begin with and remained an honor student throughout her high school years.

Obviously, this was a responsible and sincere teenager who approached her situation with a cool head. Her parents supported her decision. Perhaps more teens would be this fortunate if they approached their situations with similar rationality and sincerity.

If you are an adult and living at home with your parents, the scenario changes somewhat.

As an adult, it is presumed that you can and are taking care of yourself and your needs.

Hopefully, you do not need to remain sheltered under Mom and Dad's roof for financial reasons. If your mother and father are zealous and devout believers/followers of a particular religious path and have not shown any great liberality in your lifetime, do not expect them to show it now. If they have thrown any of their other children out for crimes against Mom and Dad's upbringing and belief systems, then you should not expect to be treated any differently. Presumably, you have a job and can afford to live on your own.

So when Mom and Dad do tell you that you have to move out, this is not a traumatic or unexpected event. However, do try to keep in mind that your mother and father are your elders; they brought you into the world

and took care of you. This is their home. They paid or are still paying the mortgage on the house, and they are entitled to life in their home as they see fit.

Similarly, when you have your own home or apartment, depending on who else is living with you, you are entitled to live life therein as you see fit.

If you are an adult living at home, if your parents are somewhat liberal, and if you believe that there can be an amicable peace between your belief systems, then they probably will not throw you out. They will probably ask some very serious questions, which you should be prepared to answer articulately and rationally. Do not become defensive or arrogant in your responses. Have patience, and always approach the situation with love in your heart.

My best advice for you is to “walk your talk.” Usually, a religious choice that is good for one’s soul winds up being good for one’s life. It usually leads to a change in how one conducts oneself and in how one lives. The best proof you could offer your family, or anybody, of how good and decent Paganism is as a religious choice, is to be a good and decent human being. It is hard to argue with success.

Coming out to your grandmother and other friends and relatives

How about your other friends and relations? Will they harass you every chance that they get? If you have relatives who are particularly zealous and if you see them quite a bit, you might want to think twice about coming out to them. Sometimes, it is just darn annoying to explain yourself over and over again at family barbecues and holiday get-togethers. You might not come out to your aunt and uncle, but your mother and father might feel obliged,

somehow, to tell the rest of the family about your choices. Therefore, when you talk to your mother and father, please tell them plainly whether you want this part of your life to remain confidential. Be explicit. Tell your mother and father that you view this as a personal matter and not one that any of the other relatives need to know about. Try to obtain a commitment from your mother and father regarding your confidentiality. Then you can go to those barbecues and holiday get-togethers with some measure of privacy. Some relatives could honestly care less how someone not residing in their household conducts him or herself. Other relatives, such as a grandmother or grandfather, might be genuinely concerned for the welfare of your soul.

If you suspect that this is the case, look honestly at any benefit in telling your grandmother or grandfather about your spiritual beliefs. If it would be particularly upsetting to them, why bother telling them? If you think that they might spend the better part of future get-togethers trying to convert you, worrying about you, or saving your soul, ask yourself if this is really something you want to put yourself or them through. Again, if you are doing this for shock value or because you want attention, then I respectfully suggest that you have not fully thought out your religious convictions in the first place.

Then there are the delicate issues of family finance. Some people have parents/relatives who seem very accepting, but, in reality, they are planning to cut the redheaded Pagan stepchild out of the estate. This is a particularly sticky wicket. If you have any fear that exposure of your Pagan beliefs will be the cause of your losing a substantial chunk of change in the family estate, you may wish to rethink your zealousness in “coming out.” If you do not give

a fig for the money and honestly do not care if you lose the house, your grandmother’s wedding silver, and the bank accounts, then do not complain when you get a kind word at the reading of a will while someone else gets the cash. Discretion can truly be the better part of valor in many instances.

If you need the money more than you need to be publicly declaring your devotion to a pre-Christian Pagan pantheon, then this appears to be a simple question with a simple answer. Many Pagans sit on the fence for a long time, hoping that their families will symbiotically figure it out and still keep them in the will. Many Pagans continue their devotions in silence, hoping for the day when their families magickally infuse their bank accounts with cash. Some Pagans throw caution to the wind and will not compromise their beliefs for a stake in the family money. The choice is entirely yours.

Eventually, most Pagans get to the point where they decide that they cannot keep their exuberance, their spirits, or their beliefs in some sort of bondage any longer. They come out, and sometimes the consequences were not as bad as they once feared.

Coming out to your spouses, significant others, friends, and lovers

Looking at spouses, significant others, lovers, and friends, I must admit that these issues always seem to be no-brainers to me. If there are people in your life who love you, then they have probably figured this out about you. You did not have to tell them. They already know all about you, and they will probably laugh when you get around to actually telling them. Then again, there will be people in your life who have suspected and have hoped

fervently that you would never actually confront them with this. When you finally do get around to flat out telling them, they are going to squirm and be rather uncomfortable. Do not look for immediate acceptance here. When questions are put to you, respond to them in a calm, loving, patient manner. Additionally, walk your talk—that is, be a living example of what you profess to believe in. It is pretty difficult to put down something that makes a positive difference in someone's life and in the lives of those around him or her. These people will eventually come around, or they will not. It is as easy as that.

Let time and circumstances work their own particular magick. Continue to be loving and patient. Continue to answer that seemingly endless stream of questions. Every once in a while, someone close to you will reveal his or her hitherto latent curiosity about Paganism, and you might actually wind up lending out some books to a kindred or sympathetic soul. If those close to you turn on you with revulsion or a need to “save you,” this is your answer: If Paganism has become so important to you that you would risk a relationship by disclosing your spirituality, chances are it is too important to you to continue to hide it in the light of someone else's disapproval. That is, if you felt compelled to tell your significant other that you were Pagan and if that person told you that the relationship was at an end due to your Paganism, you have already crossed over the line of no return. Who wants to be in a relationship like that anyway?

Trust in the Ancient Ones. Let go of this limiting set of circumstances and move on.

If you are in a marriage with someone who is firmly committed to an unforgiving, intolerant religious tradition, then you must do some serious soul searching if you wish

to reveal your Paganism. It could cost your marriage, and everything that goes with it. Are you willing, able, and ready to take this leap?

Coming out at work

If you are struggling with the issue of revealing yourself at work, you need to look at the hard legalities of the situation: could you lose your job? Yes, you could. In an issue of *Green Egg*, Phyllis Curott, a Pagan attorney, wrote: “The Constitution does not provide protection for the employees of private (non-governmental) employers. However, employers may not discriminate against someone because of [their] religion. This protection is provided by Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. In fact, it requires an employer to accommodate an employee’s religious practice so long as doing so would not cause any undue hardship to the employer. (The employer, however, need only make the most minimal accommodation, not the most favorable.) Title VII has been interpreted to include the right to take time off for observance of religious holidays and many states have enacted laws similar to and often stricter than Title VII.”¹⁶ Thus, it is probably illegal for anyone to be fired due only to his or her religious choice.

If you believe that the only reason you have been fired is your religious choice, then you need to seek out the services of a competent attorney. However, you will also have to prove this in court, and in some instances the employer may have a list of things other than your religion to rely on: you came to work late; your breaks were too long; you dressed inappropriately for work; you took too much time off; your job performance was unsatisfactory, and so forth. Unless you have a written contract of employment, some states permit an employer to fire an individual

without cause, but to fire an individual solely on the basis of religious preference is illegal.

Individuals seeking legal redress for firing presumably based only on religious discrimination will bear the burden of proving this allegation in court.

In most circumstances, religious discussion and conversation are probably inappropriate in the workplace. My best advice is not to discuss your personal, spiritual beliefs in the workplace. If you are pressed to do so by anyone, take this issue up with your supervisor. As mentioned previously in a previous chapter, if your supervisor is pressing you to reveal yourself, you are probably in a very hostile work environment, and you may wish to question how badly you need/want to stay in this particular job. You may wind up at an attorney's office anyway.

If you want to come out at work, you need to look closely at the environment in which you are working. How open-minded do the people appear to be? Would any of them be Pagan, Pagan-friendly, or Pagan-curious? How open-minded are your boss and the people with whom you have the most contact during the day? Who is in a position to sabotage you in the office? You might wish to engage one or two individuals who appear to be open-minded and receptive in some light conversation about some TV shows or movies that address Paganism, Witchcraft, and so forth. Listen to their comments.

However, I caution you: Most work environments are terrible rumor mills. Tell one person and, by the end of the week, everyone will know. People will come to you with all sorts of questions—some ridiculous and some intelligent. You may find yourself answering more questions than doing work, and that is not going to please the boss at all.

Of all the places where I most question the value of coming out, it is in the work environment. It can open a can of worms that most people simply do not have the skills to cope with. Additionally, being out in the workplace yields very little benefits, except possibly the ability to wear jewelry of faith in the open. If you are seeking the ability to wear your pentacle or your Celtic trefoil openly, you might start by wearing some sort of crystals. Crystals have gained an enormous acceptance in the last 10 years. A crystal pendant, set of earrings, or ring will not be that terribly noticed. After a few months, wear a pendant or a ring with a symbol incorporated into it. Chances are, everyone is used to seeing you wear crystals by this time, and no one is going to notice the subtle change in the jewelry. If someone does notice, then be prepared to offer a rational, articulate, accurate explanation of the symbol. Then be prepared for the consequences. One of those consequences could, indeed, be dismissal from your job. A good reference work on employment discrimination for the layperson is *Job Discrimination II: How to Fight, How to Win* by Jeffrey M. Bernbach, Esq. (Voir Dire Press, 1994).

AM I GOING TO LOSE MY CHILDREN OVER THIS?

Will the disclosure of your Paganism cost you your children? Custody battles among family members and with a state's Division of Family Services can be vicious. They are not fun.

They are time-consuming. They cost money and other precious resources. People do and say things to hurt one another, not because they have the best interests of the children in mind, but because they are working out their

own hidden agendas. By and large, courts and judges look at what is in the best interests of the children to determine whether a child should remain in a particular environment or with a particular parent. Judges are people, and thus they are not infallible nor immune to their own individual prejudices and biases.

As discussed previously, the laws governing what is in the best interests of the child vary widely from state to state. Numerous factors can weigh in this decision of whether to permit a child to remain with a parent or in a particular environment: hygiene, medical care, the school system, support networks of relatives and friends, the financial ability of the custodial parent to take care of the child, the sort of nurturing and discipline the child will receive, the safety of the child in the home and care of the respective custodial parents, whether either parent has a criminal record; a history of violence or drug use, the age and health of the respective custodial parents, and the sort of religious/spiritual upbringing the children will have.

When one parent brings the issue of Paganism, Wicca, or Witchcraft into this milieu, the Pagan parent who has just been outed has a tendency to panic. Do not panic. Hopefully, you are in this process with a lawyer. Hopefully, you made this disclosure to the lawyer, and you suggested good books for him to read, which he has done. Be prepared to do what you have always done: Answer questions in a sane, rational, articulate, patient, and loving manner. Be prepared to provide your attorney with a list of good reading for the judge, should he or she ask for it. He or she will probably want to peruse some of the Pagan literature upon which your beliefs were formulated or that support/substantiate your beliefs. The central issue here is whether your Pagan beliefs are harmful or detrimental

to the child. As attorney Phyllis Curott noted in *Green Egg*, “Generally, most states adhere to a rule that religion will be considered in deciding upon custody only when specific religious beliefs or practices can be considered to impede a child’s development and this can be articulated.”¹⁷

In most cases, if a judge is going to give custody to the other parent, it is due to several reasons, not just to one. So make sure that your home is clean, that you are clean, that the kids are clean. Be sure that the kids are medically cared for and well fed; make sure they are going to school and are doing well there. Maintain discipline in the home; keep the children out of jail and out of juvenile hall. It would be very difficult, in the wake of such an environment, to take the children from the parent providing this sort of home life for the sole reason of whom you all are praying to.

However, I cannot lie to you: It does happen. Children have, according to various accounts, been removed from the custody of a Pagan parent even though the children are well and thriving in the Pagan home. So, if you are married to an intolerant spouse, if you have intolerant in-laws, or if your own parents are intolerant, then consider your children’s welfare. Weigh this decision very carefully.

My own thought is that eventually, this cauldron will come to a full-scale boil-over. Be prepared. You will need a very good divorce/child custody lawyer, at a minimum.

SHOULD I TAKE OUT A BILLBOARD WHEN ANNOUNCING MY BELIEFS?

Methods as to how one should make the actual announcement of “Hi, I’m Pagan” vary.

Methods vary according to the people, personalities, circumstances, risks, and benefits involved.

Not too surprisingly, I favor a slow and self-fulfilling approach.

Hopefully, you are walking your talk. You are growing spiritually, emotionally, and developmentally. Hopefully, this spiritual choice has cleared up some dark spots in your life, and your life has improved significantly. You are happier, more at ease with yourself, and more at ease with the world. You are careful concerning your actions, and you are considering others before embarking on any course of action. Maybe you have started working in a local food pantry or are putting in volunteer time at either an animal shelter or at the Red Cross.

In short, you have begun to spread around this remarkable spiritual healing that you have been doing. People notice this sort of thing and, generally, they think well of it. Charitable acts done from a space of love and compassion and done with a sense of civic duty and pride are the sorts of things that get noticed by the people around you. So does having your own life and act together.

Maybe you have been wearing some crystals or some other rather curious but not entirely noticeable form of jewelry. As I've noted, these sorts of adornments are currently rather mainstream. You probably have crystals and baskets of stones, flowers, shells, and other Earth treasures floating around. No doubt, there is a piece of Pagan statuary in the house somewhere, such as a Fairy, the Green Man, an elf, an ancient Goddess, or an ancient God.

Perhaps you have some fetishes to remind you of your animal guides or a piece of artwork hanging on the wall that reminds you of your spiritual journey. There are

probably books lying about. You are probably carrying a book or two around with you wherever you go.

People notice these things. Some people will say absolutely nothing to you about this stuff.

Others will stick their faces right into it and ask you flat out what is going on.

Here it is: the thing you have been dreading/hoping for. Take a few deep breaths, center yourself, and approach this situation from a place of love, patience, and a true desire to educate those who are asking.

Please remember, however, that some people will not get it. They will never get it. The most you can ask for here is tolerance and acceptance. Some people will never give you even that. Recognize this and move on. Do not waste your energy in a situation that will drain you, hurt you, and never get any better. Sometimes there is healing and wisdom in walking away from what you can never change.

When you do explain yourself, explain yourself simply, succinctly, and sincerely. For example, someone might ask you if you are a Witch. I am asked that frequently on the radio programs that I do. Typically, I look right at the talk-show host, position the microphone in front of my mouth, and say, “Yes, I am.” (Most of them knew in advance. That was why I was there, after all.)

Then I wait for the next question. That question usually goes like this: “Well, what does that mean?” My response to that question usually goes something like this: “Witchcraft is a religion. It is recognized in the federal courts as a religion meritorious of First Amendment protection under the United States Constitution. As a Witch, I believe in both the feminine and masculine forms of Deity,

or in the Goddess and the God. I believe in magick and in life after death. It means that there are certain principles and ethics by which I live my life, such as self responsibility, being accountable for my actions, not bringing harm to others, and living my life in balance with the earth and with those around me.” I usually supply the caveat that there are other Witches whose form of Witchery is significantly different from mine.

This type of honesty and forthrightness has had an amazing effect on most people that I know, both in the media and out of the media. I get either a polite nod of the head, at which time the conversation will move onto something else, or a comment such as “This is fascinating; can you tell me more?” or a tirade about what an unbeliever and sinner I am. If you are unfortunate enough to get the latter response, politely remove yourself from the conversation immediately. You will never get anywhere with such a person, and the conversation can only end badly for both of you.

If you get the polite nod of the head with silence following or a new conversation following, then you have gotten a mildly tolerant response and a definite signal that this person does not want to hear anymore. Oblige them, and move onto another topic of conversation.

If you got a comment indicating that the other person is willing to hear more, then be very cautious about how you proceed with the conversation. You do not wish to overwhelm or talk down to this person. You probably should not reveal everything all at once. Gauge your conversation and disclosures by what the person listening to you seems willing to accept and to understand. Be moderate in this conversation, and chances are this person will again engage you in this conversation at a later time.

Once, I was at an airport to pick up one of my best friends. I was there with another best friend who is also a Pagan woman. At the time, the back of my vehicle displayed a few choice Witch bumper stickers. I was leaning over the hood of my car when another vehicle pulled up. A young woman got out of this vehicle, leaned over the hood of my car opposite me, and asked me sincerely, “Are you a witch?”

I thought that this woman was a kindred spirit, and so I responded with enthusiasm, “Yes. I am!”

The young woman then cocked her head and asked me point blank, “Why?”

I had read this situation absolutely wrong. I was not dealing with a kindred spirit, and I had stuck my broom right in it. I put on my earnest face and said, with as much sincerity and calmness as I could muster, “Because it is what I believe in.”

Never losing her cool, the young woman asked me what, exactly, was it that I believed in.

Here it was: my big chance to explain myself. Never losing my earnest face, I responded, “That the face of Deity has both a feminine and masculine face. That life is never ending. That all living creatures—be they plant, animal, or whatever—are to be revered and respected. That we should consider the consequences of our actions before we take them. That there is a bit of the divine consciousness in everyone. That Nature reflects the Divine state of the Universe right here on planet Earth. That we are the stewards of the Earth and are here to protect its resources so that everyone, including dolphins, kids, and spotted owls get their share. That children should have enough to eat, go to school, and get measles shots. Why do you ask?”

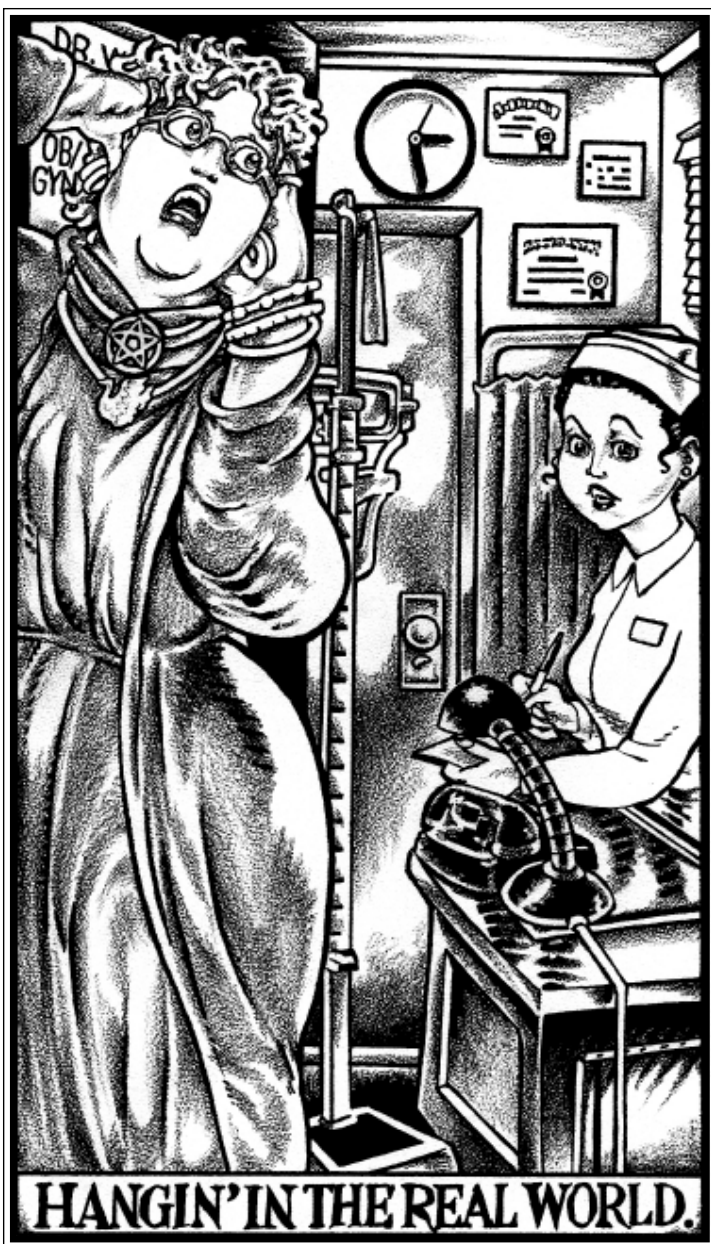
Her response was that she was curious. She asked me a few more questions, which I answered as sincerely as I could. I never raised my voice. I never used profane language. Within a few minutes, she said that she had to go, said a bright and gay “good-bye,” got into her vehicle, and left.

My friend who had come with me observed, “I think you really threw her.”

The point is this: The situation did not get out of hand. I made myself clear without escalating the situation into something unpleasant. She got an earful. I do not know what she did with it when it was over, but she got an earful. I looked at it as a lesson in discretion and a lesson in communication. Truly, learning comes from the strangest places, this one in an airport parking lot at 10:30 at night!

One friend of mine usually answers questions about her Pagan beliefs with a very honest question: “Why is it important for you to know?” She tells me that it shakes off the folks who just want to make trouble and weeds out the people who are genuinely curious and interested in learning something.

When describing and discussing your beliefs with people, remember that you might be the only Pagan person that they ever meet. Like it or not, you are an ambassador for an entire community of people when you engage someone in a conversation such as this. The practical Pagan puts his or her beliefs together in a coherent fashion and can discuss them like a rational adult. It takes practice, but it can be done!



HANGIN' IN THE REAL WORLD.

CHAPTER 9

How Do I Live My Life As a Pagan and Hold It All Together?

Congratulations! You have recognized that you are a modern Pagan with beliefs, values, and a certain ethical code of behavior. You have met other Pagans and are learning and expanding your intellectual and spiritual horizons. You have discovered new ways of networking and have discovered that you have a place in modern society. You have learned that you do not need to be pressured into anything by other Pagans and that your personal choices deserve respect. You still have your other life, though: what you do for a living, your bills, your residence, your responsibilities to your family, and all the clutter that comes with life in the 21st century.

Suddenly, you realize that you have a lot going on. What can you afford to let slip and slide? Well, actually, very little.

THE PRACTICAL PAGAN LIVES IN THE REAL WORLD, TOO

Believe it or not, there are Pagans who think that they are above simple things such as zoning ordinances, paying taxes, the performance of jury duty, and so forth. Becoming Pagan or being Pagan does not give you a one-way ticket out of the society in which you live. In fact, Pagan notions of self-accountability, self-responsibility, and consider-the-consequences-before-you-act (an updated version of “look before you leap”), actually intensify one’s duties to behave responsibly in the world at large.

I have encountered some Pagans who seem to believe that Paganism is an excuse for irresponsibility. The irresponsible behavior has ranged from disobeying court orders to failing to pay the rent on time. Tell these people that they need to stay employed or keep up with their child-support payments, and they scream, “Discrimination! Prejudice!”

Phooey! Everyone is expected to live up to their obligations and responsibilities.

Pagans are no different than anyone else in society. It is not cool to spend so much money on a credit card that you cannot make the minimum monthly payment. It is dishonorable not to meet the financial and emotional obligations that you have to your children. If you buy a house, you have to pay the mortgage on time and maintain the property according to city housing codes and zoning ordinances. If a judge orders you to do something, you had better do it or get a waiver, an extension, a variance, or something. Otherwise, you are going to the caboose for contempt of court. In order to pay for the comforts and amenities that you require/desire, you need a job. You

cannot sleep all day, stay up all night, and spend all your time on the computer. One day, the electricity is going to go off, and you are going to need to feed yourself. It's as simple as that.

MAINTAINING ORDER ON THE MATERIAL PLANE

Scott Cunningham wrote in his book *Wicca: A Guide for the Solitary Practitioner* that among the goals of a Witch are the goals of keeping words and thoughts in good order. This is not bad advice, and the practical Pagan should strive to keep his or her material life in order as well as his or her spiritual and magickal life, for one is really the reflection of the other.

A student once asked me what all this meant—to keep one's "stuff" in order. My answer reminded me of a class I took in high school. As I talked with the student, I became somewhat embarrassed. I realized that many of my own material affairs were not in order and that I had broken nearly every caveat I was discussing. No Pagan is perfect, least of all me. Keeping one's material affairs organized and orderly is very hard, and I am guilty of not doing, at some point, a lot of the things I am about to touch upon. However, the practical Pagan does strive to maintain a good footing in the real world.

In the material world, one must be clothed, housed, cleaned, and fed. You need income to do all these things. Of primary importance is the procurement of gainful employment so that you can pay the rent/mortgage, put clothes on your back, and spoon food into your mouth. Are there any others who depend on you for these things, such as offspring, a spouse, pets, or a dependent relative? If so, then there are more than just your needs to be

considered. Consider these other individuals when spending money. If others are dependent on you for monetary support, you cannot afford to be entirely hedonistic and selfish about your budget.

Get your income tax returns in on time. If you can't do that, file for an extension. Pay the rent and the mortgage on time. Be timely with your other bills: utilities (heat, water, sewer, power, and phone), credit cards, and any other debts with you have. A bad credit report can be almost insurmountable in the purchase of a car or a home or even the simple act of getting utilities and a phone installed in your name. Get a copy of your credit report. If there are any problems, there is probably a consumer credit-counseling establishment nearby that can help you. Take care of your parking tickets and work to resolve any court cases that you might have pending. Cooperate with the lawyer who might be representing you.

The cost of healthcare rises every day, and health/medical insurance will one day become an issue for almost everyone. If you are in your 20s and in relatively good health, acquire a health insurance policy and a life insurance policy if you can do so reasonably. Pay the premiums. It is amazing what we take for granted when we are young. However, as you age, your body breaks down, and all sorts of things can happen: diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and triglycerides, depression and anxiety, and heart and lung disease. These treatable and controllable illnesses are all reasons for which medical insurers and life insurers will refuse to cover you unless you already have an insurance policy or are covered under health insurance that your employer provides as a job benefit. Get started early—before you are old enough to have this sort of medical history. If you are out looking for a job, health

insurance is the sort of benefit that can make the difference between an “okay” job and a really “good” job.

Get a bank account—that is, get a checking account and a savings account. Either have your employer make a direct deposit of your paycheck into the checking and savings accounts, or do it as soon as you can after you get paid. Money will, literally, burn a hole in your pocket. Make sure that you put a little money aside in your savings account every pay period. Thrift and savings are good ideas. If you are able, start planning an IRA. The money that you deposit into the IRA or into a 401K through work is tax-deductible up to a certain amount.

Being responsible for yourself

We have previously discussed the benefits of good hygiene, wearing clean clothes, living in a clean house, and sleeping in clean bed linen. Do not look to someone else to do your laundry, make your bed, or change your bed for you. You should be doing these things yourself, unless you have some sort of real handicap or unless you have a system of pay, barter, and trade going on. If there is someone who helps you with these necessities of everyday living, remember to do kind deeds for them insofar as you are able. One good deed does, in fact, deserve another.

Keep your correspondence and paperwork in order. You need to know where to find things, and your loved ones need to know where to find things. If you are 18 or older, you should have a will. You need to make provisions for the care of your children, for your pets, for your property, for your magickal goods, for your debts, and for your assets. A little planning can make the difference between paying a lot of inheritance tax or none at all.

Having been a practicing attorney, I can tell you that families demonstrate the worst behavior on two occasions: death and divorce. Relatives can descend like locusts on your property after you have traversed the veil and dispense with it before your chosen beneficiary gets to it. Do what you can while you are living to ensure that your wishes regarding your property are met.

One of the more troubling issues that Pagans have faced is the disposition of a dead Pagan's earthly remains—that is, the whole issue of the funeral and burial. It can be very difficult to go to a staunchly Christian funeral service for someone who you knew was very staunchly Pagan. When making the provisions for your property, also remember to make provisions for what to do with your body and with your remains. You need to tell someone what you want done. One of the simplest ways to approach this issue is to make a video tape. On it, describe what you want done with your body when you are dead. Put these descriptions in your will. This is not morbid; this is practical. The gay community has been dealing with these issues for years. Many Pagans are organ donors, and they have the appropriate stickers on their licenses. Some advance planning can save a lot of arguing, a lot of heartache, and, most of all, save someone else's life, which is the ultimate act of recycling.

Being responsible for your pets

Animals are creatures of the gods and of the Universe just as we are. They need to be loved, cared for, fed, watered, kept clean, and maintained in a healthy and clean environment. Do not have pets unless you can afford them financially. Do not have pets unless you can love them and pay attention to them. If you have dogs and cats that you

do not exhibit for confirmation and show, have them neutered. Do not create, either intentionally or by negligence, litters of puppies and kittens. This is irresponsible. The human population explosion is rivaled only by the pet population explosion.

Too often, puppies and kittens go to irresponsible owners. The end results are tragic. If you have to move, try to move somewhere accommodating for the animals in your household. If you cannot do this, then you are faced with the heartbreaking task of seeing to their welfare: finding them new homes or taking them to animal shelters. Abandoning your pets, letting them scream month after month in heat, allowing them to breed carelessly, not tending to their medical needs by taking them to the vet on a regular basis for shots and worming—these are entirely unacceptable.

As Pagans, we revere and honor the animals with whom we share this planet. Your pledge and reverence to your Spirit Wolf is worthless if you do not keep your material pledge to your dog regarding his or her happiness, health, and longevity.

Being responsible for your physical health

And how about the ways in which we keep ourselves? Get a medical checkup. For women, this means a pelvic exam, breast exam, and Pap smear. For individuals who are sexually active, this means an HIV test and test for other sexually transmitted diseases. It probably means bloodwork and a urine test. A baseline for your medical condition is important, especially if you have a family and if other people are looking to you for monetary or emotional support. Do not underestimate the value and impact that you have on other lives.

You should have a regular doctor whom you visit for your general health. Women should have a regular OB/GYN. Procure the names and numbers of the local hospitals, emergency rooms, and ambulance services. They should be readily available at your telephone, together with the numbers of the police department and the fire department.

Do not neglect your dental health. Go to the dentist twice a year for X-rays, filling cavities, cleaning, and polishing. Gum disease can be devastating, and being a snaggle-toothed Romeo or Juliet is less appealing than you think. An abscessed tooth can lead to generalized septicemia (a blood-born bacterial infection throughout the body) and, if left untreated, this cascade of conditions is potentially fatal. It killed quite a few ancient Egyptians.

A well-balanced diet and moderate exercise, which includes stretching, bone-stressing exercise, and cardiovascular exercise several times a week, are imperative. Keeping the body in shape diminishes the chances for heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, and so forth. Keeping the body in shape also makes it easier to stand up and participate in ritual, to walk up and down those hills at your Pagan festival of choice, and to last longer during moments of sexual pleasure. No one with any sense advocates eating disorders or the maintenance of an unhealthy body weight, be that too much or too little. This is about your health and the enjoyment of life. I can honestly say that I do, indeed, resemble the Goddess of Willendorf figurine. The weight that I carry has not been conducive to good health, and I often need to sit down during rituals because my back or feet ache. I make no excuses for the fact that of all the caveats discussed here, the caveat about physical health is the one that I have most blatantly ignored.

Believe me when I tell you that it is best to cultivate good habits early and catch bad habits just as early. You will live longer and practice more magick if you do.

Smoking is just another method of killing off healthy lung tissue, and it makes you smell bad. The effect of your smoking on other people is a proven medical fact. What do you want to do this for, anyway? Many magickal practitioners will tell you that a healthy body moves energy around much more efficiently, and a healthy body is the finest magickal instrument of all.

Get enough sleep. Sleep with the lights and TV off. Drink 64 ounces of water a day (excluding tea, soda, coffee, juice, and so on). This promotes healthy kidneys, a healthy urinary system, and healthy skin. Moving this much water through the body increases its efficiency in purging toxins. Keep your ingestion of caffeine, sugar, fat, and salt to a minimum. Drink alcohol moderately. I recognize that there will be those occasions when you might drink and eat to excess, but keep these to a minimum.

Never drink and drive. Do not be a passenger in a car whose driver has been drinking.

Being responsible for your emotional health

Keep your interpersonal relationships, as well as your body, happy and healthy. Spend time with your family, with your friends, and with your loved ones. Tell them repeatedly that you love them and show them that you love them. There are not enough hugs in the world. Do not be afraid to show someone that you love him or her. Be honest and fair in your dealings with your loved ones. Lies and deceit are unacceptable. Listen to your heart of hearts when dealing with someone who has hurt your feelings or your pride.

Do not allow yourself to be the object of violence or of bad manners. Self-respect begins within, and you should be shown respect by those that you love and care for. Say “please,” “thank you,” and “you’re welcome.”

Show up on time. Do not break your commitments without a very good reason. Call if you are going to be late. Call if you cannot be there at all. If it is impossible to call ahead of time, call the next day. People do worry about you. Deal with one another honestly, fairly, patiently, and with love.

Yes, every now and then, you are going to get very mad at someone. Yelling and screaming, as good as they can feel, generally are not helpful in dealing with the situation. Yell and scream at your bathroom wall, if you must. You can vent this stuff somewhere other than in the face of your perceived transgressor. By the time you get to dealing with your perceived transgressor, you have hopefully vented all the visceral emotion and are now prepared to deal with this person rationally, calmly, and with patience. If not, save it for another time. Realize that some situations are hopeless, and there will be times when you have to cut and run in order to preserve your own sanity and well being.

Make peace, at least in your own mind and heart, with those people who have injured you, hurt you, and abused you. If you need counseling to do this, then get some. This does not mean that you have to confront the transgressor, throw your arms around him or her, and tell him or her that all is forgiven. What it does mean is that you have to find a place inside where you can confront these injuries without giving away so much of your precious life energy to them. After all, you want your life energy for other things, don’t you?

Do not dwell too much in the past or too far in the future. If you do, you miss the wonderful experience of now. The past provides lessons for living in the now and in the future. The past consists of rungs on a ladder, all of which brought you to where you are right at this moment. However, if you invest too much of yourself in the past, you are living in a dimension that will drain you of the energy you need to live in the present. If you need professional counseling, get some. If you are always looking to tomorrow or next month or next year, you are wishing your life away. Yes, you must be prepared, but do not let your desire for “someday” overwhelm your ability to enjoy today.

Finally, do not be afraid to admit that you might need some professional help in sorting stuff out. There are Pagan-friendly counselors out there. Ask around. You might be surprised at how many people you know have been to some form of therapy. Some therapists use a sliding scale of payment, and certain health insurance plans cover psychological/psychiatric counseling. It is no crime to admit a need for professional help and then to go out and get some.

MAINTAINING ORDER ON THE ASTRAL PLANE

Magickal practice and theory tell us that what manifests on the material plane will manifest on the astral plane, and vice versa. Cover all your bases. Keep your metaphysical affairs in good order, as well as your everyday life. What does this mean?

For your metaphysical health, it is imperative that you take, make, or steal time. Time is the most valuable commodity to spiritual and magickal health. With this time,

you will need to meditate a little each day. Additionally, spend some time daydreaming. Grounding, centering, and chakra empowerment are vital to the health of your astral body. Practice these things at least once a day. Keep faith with your deities and/or spirits of choice on a daily basis. Daily prayer is a very good thing. It keeps the channel of communication between you and The Great What Is open at all times. If your spiritual tradition requires reverence for your ancestors, remember those who have gone before you in your daily devotions as well.

It is a good idea to have a certain time of the day set aside for your internal exercises and devotionals as well as for your bodily exercise. When doing these things, take the phone off the hook and lock the front door (or put a sign on it indicating that you are not to be disturbed). Even if you have children, these things can be done. Ask your spouse, significant other, or some other adult in the household to watch the kids for a half hour. Remember to repay this kind deed.



When you ask for something and receive it, display your thanks and gratitude. When you do not get what you asked for, seek guidance and try to discern the larger wisdom in why this is so.

Remain humble before the faces of both your gods and other humans. Keep the holy days and other celebrations of your spiritual traditions. Every now and then, listen to your soul's yearning for green trees, cool running water, rustling leaves, aromatic earth, dark caves, snow, starry skies, and the pounding surf. For the years that I lived in the Midwest, I found that once a year I had to return to the cold and roiling waters of the North Atlantic off the coast of Cape Cod in order to hold my spiritual self together. Your needs might not be so specific, and you might not have the means to do exactly as you please. Go camping. Take a day trip. However, renew your bonds with the land, with the water, with the fire, with the air, and with the starry skies. These are the things that nourish the soul and restore the life energy. They lower your blood pressure and help you to live longer. Such things make you stronger energetically and magickally. They offer a whole new outlook on life.

If you need help, ask. If help is asked of you, give it if you are able and if it will not prove injurious to you to do so. If you cannot help, politely say so but offer to help at another time.

Finally, every day when you look in the mirror, say something positive to yourself: *"I am beautiful. I am wonderful. I am loved."* Such positive affirmations eventually manifest in your life.

IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE I SHOULD BE DOING?

Frankly, no, there is not. This is probably plenty. When you need to do more, the Universe will let you know. Pay attention to the hints and nudges that the Universe gives you.

Be aware and good luck! May the deities in your pantheon of choice bless you, and may you be at peace with the Universe.



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2. Jones, Prudence. "Pagan Theologies." In *Paganism Today*, ed. by G. Harvey and C. Hardman. San Francisco: Thorson's (1995), page 34.
3. Adler, Margot. *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers, and Other Pagans in America Today*. Boston: Beacon Press (1986), pages 24–25.
4. The seminal case involving Wicca arises out of the federal trial court and was affirmed in the federal appellate court. *Dettmer v. Landon*, 617 F. Supp. 592 (U.S. Dist.Ct. E Dist. Va. 1958); aff'd. on appeal, *Dettmer v. Landon*, 799 F.2d 929 (4th Cir. 1986).
5. The premiere state case is *Roberts v. Ravenwood Church of Wicca*, 249 Ga. 348, 352 (1982), wherein the Georgia state supreme court decided on the evidence that the activities conducted by the Ravenwood Church of Wicca did "constitute religious worship."

6. *Crystal Seifferly v. Lincoln Park Public Schools*, Cause No. 90-DV-60070-DT was litigated in the U.S. District Court, Eastern District of Michigan, Southern Division. For more information about this case, see my article, “The Crystal Seifferly Case: Anatomy of a Law Suit,” in *Green Egg*, v129 (July/August 1999), pages 20–22.
7. Russell, Jeffrey B., *A History of Witchcraft: Sorcerers, Heretics, and Pagans*. London: Thames and Hudson, Ltd. (1995), page 59.
8. *Hurston v. Henderson* 2001 WL 65204. A detailed case analysis can be found at www.witxhvox.com/white/hvh/html.
9. The U.S. Supreme Court, in interpreting the Constitution and the fundamental liberties alluded to therein, recognized the primary right of the parents in the care, custody, and control of their children in *Granville v. Troxel*, 530 U.S. 57 (2000). According to *Prince v. Massachusetts*, 321 U.S. 158, 166 (1944), “neither rights of religion nor rights of parenthood are beyond limitation.” A state may regulate religious activity and parental rights in order to promote the health, safety, and general welfare of its citizenry according to *Gillette v. United States*, 401 U.S. 437 (1971).
10. In Missouri, R.S. Sec. 566.083 governs, and the proscribed criminal acts are referred to as “sexual misconduct with a child.” The text of the statute describes three categories of such conduct:
 - (1) To knowingly expose the person’s genitals to a child less than 14 years of age in a manner that would cause a reasonable adult to believe that

the conduct is likely to cause affront or alarm to a child less than 14 years of age.

(2) To knowingly exposes the person's genitals to a child less than 14 years of age for the purpose of arousing or gratifying the sexual desire of any person, including the child.

(3) To coerce a child less than 14 years of age to expose the child's genitals for the purpose of arousing or gratifying the sexual desire of any person, including the child.

11. See *Baker v. Vermont*, 170 Vt. 194, 744 A.2d 864 (1999).
12. Farrar, Janet, and Stewart Farrar. *Eight Sabbats for Witches*. Phoenix Publishing, Inc., 1988. Page 43. (This is the version usually credited to Doreen Valiente.)
13. Carlisle, Kiwi. From the main ritual at Magickal Weekend (November 7, 1997).
14. The story of how this occurred is chronicled in my article "Beyond Fear," *Sage Woman*, issue number 23, Summer 1993, pages 14–15.
15. This is discussed in several U.S. Supreme Court cases, but some of the more prominent cases are as follows: *Granville v. Troxel*, 530 U.S. 57, 66–67 (2000); *Prince v. Massachusetts*, 321 U.S. 158, 256 (1944); and *Meyer v. Nebraska*, 262 U.S. 390, 399 (1923).
16. Curott, Phyllis. "Pagans and Their Religious Rights." *Green Egg*. vol. 129 (July/August, 1999), at page 7.
17. Ibid.

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Dana D. Eilers is a practicing Witch and Pagan Civil Rights advocate who has worked both in a coven and solitary for over 10 years. *The Practical Pagan* is the result of a seminar that Dana created called Conversations with Pagans. She has presented this seminar in several different states and venues, including her current hearth, located in Chatham, Massachusetts.

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